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MEREDITH.

VOL. III.

MEREDITH.

BY

THE COUNTESS OF BLESSINGTON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
LONGMAN, BROWN, GREEN, & LONGMANS.
1843.

MEREDITH.

CHAPTER I.

How gloomy and unsocial appeared our breakfast table now, after having been for some days accustomed to see the beautiful Selina seated at it, and to hear the curious and amusing admixture of French and English in which the garrulous Madame de Stourville conversed all the time. To men who have had the happiness of being used to female society, the absence of women must ever be sensibly felt at every repast; but at none so much as at breakfast, the least ceremonious and most friendly of all,

and the one which most conveys the feeling of domesticity and comfort. Never did a cup of tea or coffee taste well to me, unless poured out by a woman's hand, and sweetened by her smiles; and if there be an hour in the day in which a widower or bachelor must more particularly regret his state of single *un*-blessedness, it surely must be that devoted to his matinal repast. We hurried over our breakfast, and awaited a summons either from Mr. Somers or the magistrate, which soon after came.

When we entered his office, Mr. Somers, Selina, and Madame de Stourville, were already there. Selina's fair cheeks became for a moment suffused with a rosy red, as we entered; but quickly after changed to a paleness that touched my very soul to see. Her eyes, too, bore evident symptoms of having wept; and yet they never before appeared more beautiful in mine. She bowed to us, and attempted a faint smile,

but the expression of her countenance was so sad that it falsified the vain attempt. Madame de Stourville went through precisely the same ceremony, addressing her melancholy smile wholly to Mr. Rivers, who was so engrossed by his sympathy for Selina, as to be unconscious of the favour designed him by her *gouvernante*, who "ever and anon," cast her glances at him after the most approved fashion of sentimental heroines under the influence of the tender passion.

Mr. Somers, with a scowling brow, stood beside his daughter, and merely noticed our entrance by a cold nod to Mr. Rivers and a keen look of scrutiny bestowed on me, the result of which seemed to afford him little satisfaction, if I might judge from the increased sternness of his countenance. He was a man of a peculiarly unprepossessing appearance. Above the middle height, his figure was clumsy and ungrace-

ful, his features ordinary, and his manner *brusque* and vulgar. Mr. Rivers approached him, requesting me to follow, and introduced us to each other. A stiff bow alone marked Mr. Somers's recognition of the ceremony, but not a single word of thanks did he express for the service we had rendered to his daughter, or regret at the personal inconvenience to which I had been subjected on account of having interested myself in her behalf. My spirit was roused at his behaviour; I determined that his presence should not prevent my offering the usual civilities to Selina and her companion, consequently I held out a hand to each, and inquired after their health. The scowl on his brow increased, and Selina, who noted it, became very pale; in pity, therefore, to her feelings, I moved away, and took my station at some distance. A bustle near the door now excited our attention, and in another moment, Mrs. Lindsell, closely

veiled, and guarded by the police, entered. Mr. Somers gazed earnestly at her, and Selina's emotion was visible.

"You are here, Signora, to be confronted with the alleged father of the Signorina, whom you claim as your daughter, and of whose person you obtained possession by force," said the magistrate; "and to enable the Signor to identify you, your veil must be removed."

Mrs. Lindsell slowly raised the thick black veil, and Mr. Somers having advanced a few paces in front of her, at once betrayed that her face was not unknown to him. His countenance became livid with rage as he met her glance, and hers bore an expression of triumphant malice that she made no effort to suppress.

"Mrs. Lindsell!" repeated he, in a tone of bitter irony.

"Mr. Somers!" said the lady, with a sneer.

"Do you acknowledge this Signora to be the mother of your daughter, Signor?" demanded the magistrate.

A breathless silence reigned in the court, and all eyes were turned towards Mr. Somers, whose face assumed an ashy paleness, and whose eyes gleamed with a fearful expression of mingled hatred and vengeance. I looked at Selina, who was so agitated that she was compelled to lean on Madame de Stourville for support, and she trembled like an aspen leaf. Mrs. Lindsell all this time kept her eye fixed on Mr. Somers, till the magistrate again demanded whether he admitted the Signora to be the mother of his daughter?

Never did I behold such fierce and malignant hatred as sparkled in the eyes of this pair as they gazed at each other.

"You have not answered my question, Signor; and I call on you once more, to say

whether or not this lady is the mother of your daughter?"

"I admit that fact!" replied Mr. Somers; and at that moment a cry from Madame de Stourville drawing attention to her, I saw that my adored Selina had fainted. I rushed to support her, and bore my precious burthen to an open window. Her unnatural father only interfered to request that Mrs. Lindsell might not be permitted to approach her, that lady having made an attempt to do so. On seeing Selina recovering, I beckoned Mr. Rivers to come to me, and asked him to request Mr. Somers to allow his daughter to be spared from any longer witnessing the painful scene before her. The answer of this heartless man was, "As she has heard me acknowledge that vile woman yonder to be her mother, it is necessary that she should now be acquainted with the entire truth."

"But is it not wholly indecorous that so young, so innocent, so pure-minded a being as Miss Somers should hear the impropriety of her mother thus publicly exposed?" observed Mr. Rivers.

"*I* must be the best judge in a case which solely concerns my own affairs," replied the unfeeling and indelicate man; "and I do not wish for the advice or interference of strangers."

How full of sorrow and shame was the look that Selina fixed on me, when restored to consciousness! "Oh! Mr. Meredith," said she, in a low and tremulous tone, that touched my very heart, "I am then, after all, the daughter of Mrs. Lindsell. How has my heart deceived me! For never, never did it whisper that she could be my mother! How much, how infinitely worse it is to have such parents than to be an orphan! But I am wrong, very wrong to speak of them thus. I must learn

to behave at least dutifully, if I cannot be affectionate!"

I whispered a fond renewal of my engagement, and declared that nought on earth should induce me to resign the hope of our union. I added, that no disclosures, however painful, no discovery, however discreditable to her parents, should ever change my sentiments or devotion to her. And though she shook her head, and with a melancholy face whispered that she must now abandon all hope, I could see in that lovely countenance, that the reiteration of my vows had soothed, if not reassured her.

"As you admit this Signora to be the mother of your child," resumed the magistrate, "she must excuse me if I ask a question that implies a doubt of her honour, but which the case compels me to put. Is the Signora your wife?"

Mr. Somers's face became crimson, and for a moment his utterance seemed to be

impeded by angry emotion; but at last he spoke, and looking at Mrs. Lindsell, with rage and contempt struggling for mastery in his countenance, he said, "Yes, for the curse and bane of my life, I acknowledge her to have a legitimate claim to my name; and I execrate the hour when I committed the folly, the madness, of wedding her."

A smile of the bitterest contempt was the only notice taken by Mrs. Lindsell of this avowal.

"Having discovered her to have dishonoured me," continued Mr. Somers, "I separated from her; but, out of respect to her brother, I did not, as I might have done,—fool, dolt, and idiot as I was,—establish her guilt in a court of law, and obtain a divorce from her."

Here Mrs. Lindsell shrugged her shoulders, and said, "You know you could not." And Selina covered her face with her handkerchief, overcome with shame and grief.

"I gave her an allowance," continued Mr. Somers, "on condition that we were to meet no more, and I hoped never even to hear of her again. But judge of my surprise and annoyance when, five months after our separation, she formally announced to me by letter that she had the prospect of becoming a mother in three months more. She expected that this intelligence would have softened my anger, and induced me again to receive her under my roof; but she was mistaken; nor could all the solicitations of her family induce me to relent. I signified to her, that though the law would compel me to recognise the child, I felt so certain of its not being mine, that I should never entertain for it the slightest interest or affection—and I have kept my word."

Every eye turned to my poor Selina, the convulsive movement of whose head betrayed the agony of her feelings, her face being still concealed by her handkerchief.

Mrs. Lindsell, during this scene, remained perfectly unabashed; nor did the anguish of her daughter appear to touch her callous heart, any more than it did that of her brutal husband.

"I also signified to her," resumed Mr. Somers, "that the only terms on which I could consent to acknowledge the child, was, that it should be surrendered to me when it became a year old. I stipulated for a year, because I intended to be absent from England for that period, and that she should never demand nor expect to see it more. I also hoped that in the course of a year she might form an attachment to her child, and so charge herself altogether with its future destiny. All the efforts made—and they were many—to change my determination were unavailing. I was deemed cruel, barbarous, and vindictive by this lady and her friends; but I adhered to my resolution, and when the child was a year

old she was delivered to me, and I placed her with a proper nurse, with whom she remained until it was time to give her a governess. I took effectual means to keep the place of her residence concealed from her mother; and she lived in privacy and peace until the death of her preceptress. Her health appearing to decline some weeks previous to that event, I deemed it my duty to try the effect of a warm climate for its re-establishment, consequently sent her to Italy under the charge of the person who, I now find, was so little capable of fulfilling my instructions with regard to the perfect seclusion in which I wished her to live. How the unworthy woman, whom I had the misfortune to make my wife, acquired the knowledge of her daughter's being in Italy, I cannot surmise. I thought I had taken every precaution to conceal her movements, but I was mistaken; and the lawless mode by which she had the girl twice en-

trapped, proves that she stops at no crime to carry her nefarious schemes into execution, and cares not what vile ruffian she employs for the purpose. The laws of my country confide to me the sole charge of the girl said to be my daughter; and her mother never shall have any communication with her. If when the child was a year old I deemed it incumbent on me to separate her for ever from her mother, judge how much more necessary I now find it, when, after a career of reckless extravagance, folly, and vice, that drove her from her native land, she is now proved to have associated with some lawless profligate, surrounded by his myrmidons, with whom she concerted the plot of carrying off her daughter. Can it be believed that a mother, however bad her own conduct may have been, would have been so lost to every sense of decency, as to entrust a young girl into the hands of such

a wretch as the scoundrel she employed to carry her off!"

There was a murmur of disapprobation all through the court, and every individual in it, save poor Selina, who still kept her face covered, looked with countenances expressive of disgust at Mrs. Lindsell, who, somewhat abashed at the marks of general odium she had incurred, turned disdainfully towards her husband, and said, "The person whom you have denounced as a ruffian and lawless profligate, was no other than your own brother, who, denied by you the means of subsistence, was indebted to me for his support. As the uncle of your daughter, there was consequently no impropriety in entrusting her to his care;" and here she smiled deridingly, and with an air of triumph appealed to the persons around her.

"My brother! It is false! I have no brother!"

"Do you mean to deny Mungo Me——?" demanded Mrs. Lindsell.

"Hold! do not pronounce that name; you have already sufficiently disgraced it," interrupted Mr. Somers. "Mungo was not my legitimate brother," resumed he; "and I am not, I suppose, expected to acknowledge and provide for all the illegitimate offspring who may claim to have belonged to my father?"

"You *know*," said Mrs. Lindsell, "that Mungo was your *own* brother, born of the same father and mother, but previous to the marriage that united your father to the Creole slave that had been his mistress, and rendered you legitimate!"

The face of Mr. Somers was fearful to behold, as his wife, in a loud and clear voice, uttered this statement. His wrath seemed to be only the more deadly, that it was not suffered to explode; and the alternate crimson hue and ashy paleness of his

face betrayed the internal struggle to suppress the outpouring of his demoniacal rage.

"I have long listened to this painful scene of mutual recrimination," observed the magistrate, "and am of opinion that its continuance can do no good. The Signora being acknowledged by you (turning to Mr. Somers) to be your wife, and the mother of the Signorina, is not amenable to our laws for having possessed herself, even though by violent means, of the person of her child."

"The laws of England would severely punish her in such a case," interrupted Mr. Somers, pale with anger.

"The laws of England were probably made to meet and provide for the cases to which the habits and tempers of the inhabitants may give rise. In Sicily, we have no provisions in our laws for punishing a mother for carrying off her own child, because we have no fathers who debar mothers

from beholding their offspring, or from knowing where they live, or how they are cared for. Your English laws, Signor," continued the magistrate, "are adapted to English people; but as here we are governed by those of Sicily, this Signora must be discharged, while to you is confided the person of your daughter."

"And is there no punishment for this woman?" asked Mr. Somers, angrily.

"It is surely punishment enough to be deprived of her daughter, and such a daughter, too!" replied the magistrate.

"Am I not to be allowed to see my child?" demanded Mrs. Lindsell. "Oh! no, you cannot be so cruel as to prevent my seeing her, if only at stated times. I will submit to anything, go anywhere, if you will only let me sometimes press her to my heart!" and here she applied her handkerchief to her face. Selina, too, became much agitated at hearing her mother thus imploring her

father, and arose to approach her, but Mr. Somers seized her by the arm, and commanded her, "on her peril, to hold no communication with her disgraceful mother."

How my heart bled for the poor girl, thus torn by contending emotions, and how I longed to make her my wife, and take her from parents who were in every way so wholly unworthy of her. Mr. Somers, drawing the arm of his daughter within his, and followed by Madame de Stourville, left the court; and Mrs. Lindsell, too, glancing after him with eyes from which shot forth gleams of hatred and malice, also retired.

CHAPTER II.

Mr. Rivers and I then held a consultation as to what was best to be done. We felt assured that Mr. Somers would, as soon as possible, take his daughter from Palermo; and I determined, previously to his departure, to write and formally demand her hand. It was in vain that Mr. Rivers reminded me of my youth, and recommended the propriety and prudence of trying the effect of absence on my passion, before I took this final step. He spoke, too, of the disadvantages of the connexions I should

form by such a marriage. A mother-in-law, branded with dishonour, the companion of a lawless adventurer, who, even if he were, as she asserted, the brother of her husband, nevertheless was an unsuitable associate for any woman not lost to every sense of decency. The father, too, was little less objectionable than the wife he so indelicately denounced before the whole court, and in the presence of his daughter. Such a man could have no feeling or principle; and how pregnant with humiliation and annoyance must so near an alliance with two such persons prove to the man who united himself to their daughter.

All this, and much more, did Mr. Rivers urge to induce me not to propose for Selina to her father; but he urged in vain; for the disgraceful conduct of her parents, to which I was as keenly alive as he could be, only served to render me more desirous to withdraw her from their power, and to bestow

on her that affection and protection of which so young, so lovely, and so amiable a creature stood so much in need. Pity for her unhappy position was now added to the passionate love I had previously entertained for her; and there was no sacrifice that I would not have willingly made to rescue her from it. Mr. Rivers, finding that my decision was irrevocable, ceased to remonstrate, and I, as soon as we entered the *albergo*, addressed a letter to Mr. Somers, requesting his sanction to lay myself and fortune at the feet of his lovely daughter.

Having despatched this letter, I paced the room in a state of agitation known only to persons as much in love as I was, and under similar circumstances. I felt that on the answer of this harsh and callous man depended my happiness; and that, although my birth and fortune entitled me to count on being an acceptable husband to the daughter of any reasonable father, I had a presentiment

that he would blight his child's prospects and my own by a refusal. His answer was soon brought, and realized my fears. It coldly—nay, uncivilly declined my proposal, and desired, henceforth, that I should never attempt any renewal of acquaintance with Miss Somers, to whom, it added, he had given orders to avoid all interchange of civilities with me. How great was my anger and indignation as I perused this insulting epistle; yet both became subdued as I reflected on the position of my beloved Selina, with so harsh, so brutal a companion.

We learned in the evening that the packet for Naples was to sail the next morning, and the waiter added the intelligence that Mr. Somers had secured a cabin for himself and his daughter. My first impulse was for us also to take our passage in the same vessel; but Mr. Rivers suggested that our doing so would only tend to expose Selina to greater suspicion and unkindness from her father.

At length, it occurred to me that the cicerone so strongly recommended by Mr. Medlicut, and whom we had found to be a very well-informed and intelligent man, would be a good person to send to Naples in the same vessel with Mr. Somers, and by not losing sight of that gentleman, keep us *au fait* of his movements until we could join him. Mr. Vincent was a kind-hearted and simple-minded man, devoted to study, and so erudite that he possessed a fund of literary knowledge seldom equalled, which with his unobtrusive modesty and obliging disposition had won him our good will.

Mr. Rivers approved the plan, and we forthwith sent for Mr. Vincent, who willingly assented to it, and retired to his own abode to prepare for his unexpected voyage.

While we sat conversing on the painfulness of being under the same roof, yet debarred from seeing Selina, Madame de Stourville entered the room. She bent her

head, looked on the ground, and exhibited all the marks of embarrassment and timidity commonly betrayed by very youthful damsels when they desire to appear more than usually interesting. Mr. Rivers being next her, placed a chair, and both of us evinced the good will we really entertained for her.

"You see before you, gentlemen," said she, applying a cambric handkerchief, redolent of the perfume of *eau de Portugal* to her eyes, "*la plus malheureuse des femmes*. Monsieur Somers has, in de most barbarous *manière*, given me my *congé*, and has refused to defray my expenses to Paris, as, on our first engagement, he had agreed to do. Nay, more, he has reproached me, in de most insulting terms, vid having been bribed by you, Messieurs, to allow Monsieur Meredis to travel vid *ce pauvre cher ange*, and, I blush to add," and here she concealed her face with her handkerchief, "that he said he knew there was an *attachement*

entre moi, and—but no—really I can hardly bring myself to name it—Monsieur Rivére."

Never were astonishment and annoyance more plainly depicted on a face than on that of Mr. Rivers, as she finished this speech.

"What! me, madame?" uttered he; "such an insinuation is quite preposterous! I hope you at once convinced him of its falsehood."

"*Helàs! non. Que voulez vous?* I was taken by surprise. My agitation, my blushes, but too well betrayed *le secret de mon cœur*. Dese proofs of de candour and purity of my sentiments were received by dis harsh man as indubitable ones of de truth of his assertion; and de consequence is, dat I now find myself *au désespoir*, a stranger in a foreign land, a helpless and unprotected voman."

"You shall not need protection or kindness, Madame," said Mr. Rivers, good-naturedly.

"*Est-il possible!—est-il possible!—Oh, mon Dieu!* den Monsieur Somers vas not wrong; you lofe me, *cher Monsieur Rivére, vous m'aimez donc!*" and Madame de Stourville arose from her chair, and advancing towards her supposed admirer, would have thrown herself on his breast, had he not repulsed her, and with terror painted on his countenance, retreated to the far side of the chamber.

"Vat you mean, vat you mean, Monsieur Rivére?" demanded she. "You say, von minute ago, I never shall need de protection nor de kindness. Does not dat mean dat you vill give dem both, vich you cannot do, if you are not to be mine husband."

"I meant, Madame, that from Mr. Meredith and myself you may count on all the protection and kindness in our power to shew to a lady in your peculiar position. Your attention and attachment to Miss Somers have won our esteem, and we

desire to prove it by every means in our power."

"Vat, den you do not lofe me, after all. *Oh, homme cruel et ingrat!* to have von my affections, and now——" And she burst into a paroxysm of tears that for some time impeded her utterance.

Although little, Heaven knows, disposed to smile, it was difficult to resist, when looking from the weeping Frenchwoman to Mr. Rivers, whose countenance was so expressive of alarm and embarrassment as to be truly comic.

"*Homme barbare!* to have thus trifled vid my feelings, and ruined my peace of mind," resumed the lady. "Oh! I shall never put fait in man no more!—*jamais, jamais!*"

"Really, Madame, you surprise and mortify me. What can have led you to such an erroneous conclusion with regard to my sentiments, I am utterly at a loss to imagine;

but I must request you will dismiss such foolish thoughts from your mind, and if you wish me to continue your friend, refer to them no more."

"*Homme, faux et cruel!* You say you not know vat made me tink you lofe me. Vy did you look so often, and O, so tenderly at me? Vy like all de same dishes dat I like? Vy speak to me always ven Monsieur Meredis vas speaking to *ce cher et bel ange*, vich made me tink, and so every voman vould tink too, dat vile he make de lofe to Mademoiselle, you make de lofe to me."

"I make love to you, Madame! really it is quite ridiculous! At your age and mine!"

"Do not insult me, Monsieur Rivére. It is very *méchant*, very vicked indeed, to talk of my age. *Le cœur qui peut aimer n'est jamais vieux.* I vish I vas old, very old, for den I vould not be so unhappy as I

now am, for I could not lofe. Oh—oh—oh!" And again her tears began to flow plenteously.

"You really distress me, Madame de Stourville," said Mr. Rivers. "It appears that you have mistaken the common courtesies due to every lady from a gentleman, for the marks of an attachment which candour compels me explicitly to declare I have never felt."

"Vy, den, did you always look at me so much? Have I not noticed dat even ven Monsieur Meredis, or *ce cher et bel ange* speak to you, you look always at me, and vat could I tink but dat it was because you lofed me?"

"The infirmity of obliquity of vision under which I have suffered for many years, has led to your mistake, Madame. I regret it very much, but having now entered into this explanation, I must request that the subject be referred to no more."

"*O mon Dieu! quel coup pour mon pauvre cœur! Que je suis malheureuse! que je suis à plaindre!* No, never, never no more will I believe in de eyes of any man, if dey look ever so lofing at me."

"You will do wisely, Madame, for at your age——"

"Do not talk of age. It is very *mal-honnête* and very *grossier* to do so. No man ever do talk of de age of a voman, except to affront her, unless at de office *d'assurance*, and I never vould go dere on dat account, *malgré* I vished to insure my life for de benefice of a poor *cousine*."

"Let us dismiss this disagrecable subject, and revert to your future plans, Madame," said Mr. Rivers.

"*O mon Dieu!* de future is no longer *couleur de rose* for me. I did build de beautiful *châteaux en Espagne;* and you vere de object principal in dem all, Monsieur Rivére. I did tink how happy ve should

be, ven Monsieur Meredis and *ma chère demoiselle* vere married, and you and I vere married also; and you vould give me one *charmant* leetle dog, and ve should valk togeder every day in de fine veader, and take de leetle dog vid us, and ve should go to de *spectacle* in de evening, and be so happy; but you——"

"Really, Madame de Stourville, you exhaust my patience, and I did expect more good sense from a person of your age."

"Dere, again, always mine age! Can you not forget mine age?"

"Madame de Stourville, this silly affair must end at once, and for ever. Any future reference to it will prevent me from serving you as I wish to do. If you will explain your wishes, Mr. Meredith and I will aid you to carry them into effect."

"My vishes! *Helàs!* vat vishes are now left to me?"

Here a gesture of impatience on the part

of Mr. Rivers stopped her further recapitulation of her chagrin; and she added, that it was her desire to return to Paris.

"The means of doing so shall be provided," said Mr. Rivers; "and you may freely command any other service that Mr. Meredith and I can render you."

Our cicerone now entered to bid us farewell, previously to going on board the packet; and Madame de Stourville, having learned that he was to proceed to Naples, was desirous of embarking at the same time, in order to have his protection; "a lady," as she said, "being always exposed to many annoyances when alone, as she had experienced when crossing from Naples to Palermo, when no less than two men had been so marked in their admiration of and attention to her as really to alarm her!"

"One would have thought, Madame, that at your age," observed Mr. Rivers——

"Pray have done, Monsieur!" inter-

rupted Madame de Stourville. "You are de only gentleman, except dat *barbare*, Monsieur Somers, who ever talked of my age."

"I must leave dis place," resumed Madame de Stourville. *Oui, c'est nécessaire.* If I do not sail in de same ship vid Mr. Somers, dat vicked man vill say I stay vid Mr. Rivére, and mine honour will be suspect."

"Mr. Vincent is going to Naples in the same packet, Madame," said Mr. Rivers, "and will afford you protection on your voyage."

"*Comment, est-il possible? Je suis charmée!*" exclaimed Madame de Stourville.

"It will, however, be prudent," observed Mr. Rivers, "that you and Mr. Vincent appear as strangers to each other, to avoid incurring the suspicions of Mr. Somers."

"*O ciel!* dat vill be so *romanesque*,

n'est ce pas? Just like a *roman*, vat you call a novel,"—and the lady bestowed one of her most winning smiles on Mr. Vincent, as he left the room to prepare for embarking.

Mr. Rivers, by my desire, placed in an envelope a sum not only sufficient to defray Madame de Stourville's expenses to Paris, but to maintain her there for a year to come; and having placed it in her hand when she returned to wish us good bye, which she did with streaming eyes, she left the hotel, escorted by its master, who offered to see her on board.

CHAPTER III.

How long and tedious seemed the days that intervened before the sailing of the next packet, in which we embarked for Naples, and how interminable appeared the voyage, which, owing to our being becalmed, was of four days' duration. Our *cicerone* was on the mole, waiting our arrival, and assured us that Mr. Somers and his lovely daughter were still at Naples, and lodged at the Grande Bretagne, on the Chiaja, where they were detained by his serious indisposition, which had commenced the day after their arrival.

"The old gentleman is confined to his bed, from the side of which he rarely permits Miss Somers to go," continued Mr. Vincent; "so that knowing he could not be aware of your vicinity, I have secured apartments for you in the same hotel, thinking that it might possibly sometimes enable you to seize a few moments' interview with the young lady; and, at all events, that you would be glad to be near her in case of the old gentleman's dying, which his physician pronounces is most probable.

Madame de Stourville, Mr. Vincent told us, was also lodged at the Bretagne, and rendered herself very useful to Miss Somers, by attending, in the next chamber, to every thing required for the sick man, although she dared not present herself before him, nor did he know she was in the house.

I was delighted to find myself again beneath the same roof with my adored Selina; and having written a few lines to tell her of

my arrival, I sought an interview with Madame de Stourville, who, believing Mr. Somers to be dying, no longer refused to convey a billet which I consigned to her, to be delivered to Miss Somers.

"*O mon cher Monsieur Meredis, comme je suis contente de vous voir—quel bonheur! Et ce cher ange, elle est si bonne, si aimable!* She nurse dat *barbare*, night and day, as if he vas de best fader in all de vorld; but she make me angry ven she veeps at de fear he will die. *Quel tresor ce bon Monsieur Vincent!* He take such good care of me. Vat a man! *Si poli, si prevenant envers les dames.* Never talk of de age. *Mais les hommes Irlandais* are like de French men, always *aimable* to de vomen. Not like Monsieur Rivére, who affront me very much, and talk always of de age."

I could hardly break away from Madame de Stourville, so loquacious was she grown;

but I at length persuaded her to take my note, and wait in the adjoining chamber to Mr. Somers' until she had an opportunity of delivering it to my beloved Selina. While partaking of some refreshment, Mr. Vincent entered, and informed us that the physician, who had just left Mr. Somers, had told that gentleman, that if he had any affairs to be attended to, there was no time to be lost. Consequently the English Consul had been sent for by the desire of the sick man, and was now with him; as also an English solicitor who happened to be at Naples, and who, in compliance with the Consul's request, made by desire of Mr. Somers, had come to draw up his will. Shortly after, Madame de Stourville entered, and informed me that my note had been delivered, and that its perusal had evidently given satisfaction. "Monsieur Somers has made his *disposition testamentaire*," continued the garrulous French-

woman; "and an English clergyman is vid him; and *ce cher ange* is on de knees praying to God for him, vid de tears running down her poor pretty face!"

That night Mr. Somers breathed his last; and his lovely daughter, worn out with the fatigue of her incessant anxiety, and watching by his bed-side, was carried almost in a state of insensibility to her bed, where, having a gentle opiate administered to her by the physician who had attended her father, she sunk into repose,—Madame de Stourville installing herself as *garde malade* in the chamber.

Mr. Rivers, who was known to the Consul, had an interview with him the next day; when that gentleman informed him that the will was deposited in his hands to be forwarded to England. He was also charged with the management of the funeral, which was to occur within four-and-twenty hours from the death; and that he had placed

seals on all the effects of the deceased. "I should have proposed removing the young lady to my house, continued the Consul, "where my wife would have paid her every attention in her power; but as the lady under whose protection her father had formerly placed her is on the spot, she will perhaps be more comfortable during the first days of her affliction by being left wholly with her;" an opinion in which Mr. Rivers perfectly coincided.

Both he and I attended the funeral of Mr. Somers, as we wished to shew this mark of respect to the feelings of his charming daughter; and I was glad to learn from Madame de Stourville, that it had given her satisfaction.

When Mr. Rivers and I were conversing on the position in which my beloved Selina was now placed, he observed, that he greatly feared that her unworthy mother, when informed of her husband's death, would come

forward to claim the guardianship of her daughter, unless, as he hoped might be the case, the deceased had in his will named other guardians for her, and prohibited the interference of that lady. This notion of his created a strong feeling of alarm in my mind; for, harsh and brutal as had been the conduct of Mr. Somers, I considered his daughter to be much more safe in his charge than she would be in that of her mother.

A week after the death of Mr. Somers, Mr. Rivers and I were admitted to the presence of my adored Selina. Thin, pale, and languid, she appeared like the shadow of her former self; yet, as a delicate blush mantled on her cheeks when I approached her, I thought she had never previously looked more beautiful. The soothing kindness of Mr. Rivers, and my tender attentions, evidently cheered and comforted her;

and she expressed great satisfaction at having Madame de Stourville with her.

"My poor father," said Selina, sighing deeply, "had grown very kind to me since his illness. Ah! would to Heaven he had lived long enough to know me better, but he was snatched away just as he had began to judge more favourably of me; and the gratitude he evinced for the care and attention which it was only my duty to shew him so melted my heart, that I felt I could have forgotten all his past unkindness, and have learned to love him as a daughter should. He told me that he wished me to proceed to England under the care of some lady, to be chosen for the purpose by the Consul, and who would be liberally remunerated for the trouble; and he wished two steady men-servants to be engaged to attend me on the journey. He said that he had appointed me a ward in the Court of Chancery, and

commanded me never to hold intercourse with my mother. Oh! how shall I tell the rest? Yet it must be told. He said that he had reason to believe that I was not his child, and that it was this conviction that led him to treat me with such indifference and unkindness; that he now repented having so done, for though I was not his child, the fault was not mine, and from my affectionate attention to him during his illness, he felt sure I might have been a comfort to him had he sooner learned how to value me. Oh! you know not how kindly, how gently he spoke to me at last!"—and the dear and amiable girl wept in deep emotion. "I have bequeathed you the whole of my fortune, Selina," said he. "You will be rich — you will be sought after!"

"Did he name me?" asked I, greatly agitated.

"Yes," replied Selina, blushing, and

casting down her eyes, "he did refer to you. He said that he was now sorry that he had not cultivated your acquaintance; but that, in refusing, he was actuated by a motive that was not unkind, however it might appear; for it originated in a dread that your family would not (from painful circumstances known to him, but to which he would not then refer) approve any ties of friendship to be formed between you and him, or sanction any nearer alliance."

"How strange and unaccountable!" exclaimed I, quite forgetting, in the warmth of my affection for Selina, that there was nothing either strange or unaccountable that any family should disapprove of an attachment of its heir to a girl, however amiable and excellent, whose mother stood charged as hers did, and whose father was capable of making the gross and public exposure of his wife, and outraging the feelings of his daughter, as he had done at Palermo. Nevertheless, no

sins of the parents could shake my affection for Selina, and no sacrifice appeared too great for me to make to secure her hand. I whispered that I was wholly independent of family ties, had no near relations to offer a useless opposition to my wishes, and that all my happiness rested on the hope of calling her mine. How beautiful was the soft blush that tinged her pale face, and the faint smile that for a moment played over her delicate lips, as she murmured,

"Hush! hush! speak not of happiness now; it looks like a sacrilege towards the dead!"

The Consul called on Selina the next day, and finding her much better, advised her proceeding to England as soon as her health would admit of her undertaking the journey. He had an interview with Mr. Rivers, and consulted him on the subject; and Mr. Rivers, who feared nothing so much as that Selina's mother might, on

hearing of the death of her husband, come and claim possession of her daughter, strenuously advised the same measure to be adopted as that which the Consul had previously recommended.

"I hardly like to trust so fair, and, as I hear, so rich a young heiress, to the sole charge of the old French lady and two male attendants for so long a journey," said the Consul. "I wish that any English family were returning home, or any gentleman, whose age and character would render him eligible for such a trust, was going back to England, to whom I might confide the care of this interesting and charming young lady."

"I am on the point of returning home with Mr. Meredith, and purpose leaving Naples in a day or two," observed Mr. Rivers; "and if you deem me worthy of the trust, it will give me pleasure to undertake it. Our carriage can closely follow that of

the young lady and her *dame de compagnie*, and I will not lose sight of them until they have safely arrived in London."

"I look on this chance as a very fortunate one for this unprotected young creature," replied the Consul, "and accept your obliging offer with unfeigned satisfaction, as there is no one, Mr. Rivers, to whom I would more readily consign such a charge than to you."

I could have hugged Mr. Rivers when he informed me of this arrangement, which removed a load of anxiety from my mind; nor did the lovely Selina oppose it, nor attempt to conceal the satisfaction it afforded her. Madame de Stourville was positively wild with joy when she first learned it; for the disagreeable occurrences that had taken place at La Cava and Pæstum had rendered her timid, and doubtful of the safety of travelling without other protection than that of servants. After a few minutes,

however, her countenance assumed an air of dissatisfaction, and heaving a deep sigh, she exclaimed, "*Mais ce pauvre Monsieur Vincent!* vat is to become of him? *Oh! mon Dieu!* how *triste* it will be for him to go back alone to dat Palermo, vere he so seldom have any pupils, and can earn so leetle money!"

Mr. Rivers looked archly at me, and said, "Yes, Madame, it will be very *triste* indeed for him, more especially after having lately enjoyed the happiness of your society!"

"He is vera *aimable!*" resumed Madame de Stourville. "*Si poli envers les dames*, and never talks of anybody's age. *Vraiment*, it is a pity, ven ve are all so happy" —but here a glance at Selina's pale face and deep mourning dress reminded her of the impropriety of the phrase, and she attempted to correct it by adding—"so *un*-happy, I meant to say."

"Then you, Madame, are of the opinion

expressed in the old song?" said Mr. Rivers, ironically.

"Vat old song?" demanded Madame de Stourville.

"That which says, 'Let us all be unhappy together,'" replied Mr. Rivers, keeping as grave a face as he could assume.

"*Oui, oui, vous avez raison*, Monsieur Rivére; for if it is vell for friends to be togeder ven dey be happy, it is *certainement* a consolation to be so ven dey are unhappy. And *ce pauvre cher Monsieur Vincent, si aimable et si malheureux, et surtout, si poli envers les dames!* It vas only dis morning, ven I ask him if I not look very ill in de black dress, he did say, a lady could never look ill in anyting. Vas not dat *aimable?*"

"I partake Madame de Stourville's good opinion and sympathy for Mr. Vincent," said I, "and think, Mr. Rivers, that he

would be an admirable librarian at Meredith Park. What is your opinion? Shall I make him the offer?"

"*Oh! mon cher Monsieur Meredis*, how good, how *aimable* you are!" exclaimed Madame de Stourville, her face becoming lighted up with pleasure.

"I think very well of the project," replied Mr. Rivers; "for from what I have seen, as well as heard, of this simple and warm-hearted Hibernian, I have formed a very high opinion of him, and agree with Madame de Stourville, that it would be a pity to leave him in exile in a country where neither his erudition nor good character can enable him to acquire the means of subsistence, and where, if his patron, Mr. Medlicut, were to die, he would be left without a friend."

My proposal was joyfully and gratefully accepted by poor Vincent, and it was ar-

ranged that he should occupy the front box of Selina's carriage,—much to the satisfaction of Madame de Stourville.

Our brief preparations being completed, we left Naples on our route for England; and I soon after observed with delight, that the change of air and scene produced the happiest effect on Selina's health. We rested a day at the romantically situated inn at Mola di Gaeta, embosomed in groves of lemon and orange trees, the beautiful flowers of which last perfumed the air, while the golden fruit shone amid the dark, clustering leaves, and the tall and picturesque aloe towered above them. The blue and placid Mediterranean sparkled 'neath the beams of the bright sun; and many a white sail floated over its broad expanse. As we sat in the balcony which commands the enchanting prospect, and I heard the sweet accents of my adored Selina pronounce her delight at the scene, how were

its charms enhanced to me! Beautiful as I had acknowledged it to be when I had formerly rested here *en route* to Naples, with what different feelings did I now contemplate it! My heart had then never owned the power of love,—that power which wields its influence so despotically over mankind; and my mind dwelt more on the fate of that spirit-stirring orator, whose name still adds such classical associations to this place, than on self. Now, however, Mola di Gaeta became to me a region of romance, and the fair creature by my side was the enchantress who had wrought the change.

Ours was a happy journey, and I could have wished it prolonged for months instead of days. Nor was I, as it soon became evident, the only enamoured person of the party. Madame de Stourville, it was plain, had transferred her affection from Mr. Rivers to Mr. Vincent; of which she exhibited

many proofs, greatly to the annoyance of the good-natured Irishman, who endeavoured, as much as possible, to discourage her attachment, although his natural politeness to the fair sex rendered him loth to appear ungrateful.

CHAPTER IV.

ARRIVED at Geneva, we took up our abode at Secheron, and determined to repose there two or three days. The evening of our arrival, Mr. Vincent entered our apartment in a state of excitement in which I had never previously observed him, and in answer to my inquiries as to the cause, told me that the oldest and best friend he had ever known had half an hour before driven up to the door of the inn. "I instantly recognised and made myself known to him," said he; "and as he is going to Italy for the

recovery of his health, he has requested me to return with him there. I therefore hope you will not think me ungrateful for declining to accompany you to England; for, believe me, I am most sensible of all your kindness."

"But you seem depressed rather than exhilarated by encountering your friend," observed I.

"Alas! sir, the sight of him has re-opened wounds that I had believed healed, and he has communicated to me events that have deeply pained me!"—and poor Vincent's lips trembled with emotion.

"But will not the constant presence of this friend keep alive the regret which now agitates you?" demanded I.

"Even if it should, sir, I consider it my duty to remain with Sir Thomas Netterville as long as he may think my society can cheer or be of use to him. I was his tutor for some years, and received the utmost

kindness from his worthy parents. He had a sister—but why should I intrude my sad story on you?"

I begged him to continue his narrative; and he resumed it, evidently gratified by the interest I evinced.

"Sir Thomas had a sister, beautiful as the fair ideal of which youthful poets dream, and good as beautiful. She became the object of my love, of my idolatry; but never, even in my wildest moments of passion, did I breathe a word that could betray what was passing in my soul. Unsuspicious of my feelings, her condescension to me as the friend, as well as the tutor, of her only brother, fanned the flame that burned in my breast. I trembled lest my secret should be discovered, and imposed the utmost restraint on myself to conceal it, when proposals were made by a gentleman of large fortune in the neighbourhood for the hand of Miss Netterville; and her acceptance of

his suit, suddenly announced to me by her brother, produced so violent a revulsion in my frame, that my long-cherished secret was in a moment revealed. The pity, the kindness of that brother I never have forgotten. Instead of spurning the humble and obscure hireling who had presumed to raise his eyes to the high-born and lovely creature, whom the noblest might be proud to wed, he tried to comfort and console me. Finding that I could not bring myself to remain, to be present at the marriage, he obtained me permission to absent myself for some time; and having forced on me his purse and this watch,"—drawing out a gold one,—" I left the mansion where the happiest hours of my life had been spent, and where still dwelt the idol of my heart. I never returned to it. I felt that to see her the wife of another was more than I could bear; and having reached Dublin, I engaged as a travelling tutor with a young

Irish nobleman, who unfortunately died in Italy a year after, when I went to Palermo, where I have ever since remained. The object of my first, my only love,—as her brother has told me,—was for some years a neglected and an unhappy wife, and died of a broken heart. Oh! that there could be found on earth a man capable of neglecting such a treasure! My friend has long since succeeded to the fortune of his father, and is a childless widower in broken health. His reception of me was such as to touch me to the very soul, and I could not refuse his request to return with him to Italy."

While Vincent was still speaking, Madame de Stourville entered, and observing his altered looks, exclaimed, "*O ciel!* Monsieur Vincent, you are ill! Vat is de matter? *Prenez quelque chose!*"

The undisguised and warm interest evinced by the good-natured but weak-minded old lady towards Mr. Vincent

escaped not the observation of Mr. Rivers, who looked significantly at me as he noted it. The object of her sympathy, however, seemed wholly unconscious of it, so entirely engrossed was he by the painful reflections to which his unexpected rencontre with Sir Thomas Netterville had given birth. When he left the room, overcome by his feelings, Madame de Stourville demanded an explanation.

"Vat is all dis *mystère?* Vy is *ce pauvre cher Monsieur Vincent si agité, si pâle?*"

"What but the tender passion, all-mighty love, could reduce any one to such a state?" said Mr. Rivers, maliciously.

"Lofe!" reiterated the lady. "But vat makes him despair? He not know but dat de lady he lofes, lofes him too."

"But if there is an insurmountable obstacle to his union with her?" observed Mr. Rivers.

"*I* not know of any," replied Madame de Stourville, with the utmost *naïveté*.

"It is really a pity," resumed Mr. Rivers, "that so fine-looking a fellow, and so good a one too, should be a victim to the tender passion, more especially at his age."

"*Toujours parlant de l'âge*, vat for you always speak of de age?" exclaimed the old lady, angrily. "Have I not before told you dat de person who is capable to be in lofe cannot be affirmed to be too old."

"Poor fellow! I pity him," said Mr. Rivers, musingly.

"But I not see vy you need pity him. If his lofe is de cause, vy perhaps de lady lofe him too. Vy not inform her at vonce, and have no *mystère?* I hate de *mystère*."

"I told you before, Madame, that there is an insurmountable obstacle to their marriage."

"I do not believe it, but vat you mean?"

"The only lady he ever loved——"

"Vat, *est il possible* he never lofed before? *tant mieux!* I am glad."

"The only lady he ever loved, a young, a lovely girl——"

"*Comment!* O, de vicked man! But dey are all de same. I have not de patience vid dem. And vat business has de old man of his age to fall in lofe vid a young girl, I should like to know? *Fi donc!*"

"Why, Madame, it is only a few minutes ago that you declared you did not consider him old," observed Mr. Rivers, slily.

"Vell, I mean by dat not too old to fall in lofe vid a lady of a certain age, dat is, of a *raisonnable* age."

"Alas! Madame, I fear that men, however old themselves may be, never do fall in love with women of what you call a reasonable age. It is doubtless a great folly on their part; nevertheless, thus it is."

"It is a grand folly, a very grand folly, Monsieur Rivére, and dey ought to be

ashamed of it. *Mais revenons.* How long has Monsieur Vincent lofed de young lady?"

"Thirty-five years."

"Tirty-five years! *Mon Dieu!* Den she is no longer young!"

"She is dead, Madame."

"Vat you say, dead? *Vraiment morte?*"

"Yes, Madame."

"*Tant mieux!* den, if she lived until now, she vould have been vat you gentlemen call old voman, and you not mean to say dat he vould not still have continued to lofe her? Now, if Monsieur Vincent have de good fortune to encounter a lady of de same age dat his first lofe would be, had she lived, do you not tink he might be consoled, and lofe de new lady?"

"Knowing mankind as well as I do, Madame, I fear I must pronounce that in such a case a man would be much more likely to be consoled by a lady of the age of his first love, when she died, than of the age

she would have been, had she lived thirty-five years longer."

"*Est-il possible! O! quel manque de cœur, quel manque de sentiment!* Dat proves de men to be *barbare*. Den I suppose no man do lofe his vife ven she grows old?"

"Yes, Madame, many do."

"Den surely von voman who is not young (I hate dat vord old) may be as agreeable in a man's eyes as anoder, and besides, de novelty of de new face is better dan de face he has looked at for tirty-five years."

"Few men would think so, I believe, Madame, for in the wreck of the faded face they had looked on for thirty-five years, they would trace some remnants of the fair and blooming one that had captivated their youthful hearts. It would recall the memory of days of happiness, of trials, passed together, of reciprocal tenderness and sym-

pathy, of mutual forbearance and of tested affection; so that the faded face, endeared by thirty-five years' contemplation, would be infinitely more agreeable than a new face of similar age that had outlived its bloom, and lost it, too, as well as the freshness of the heart, before we beheld it."

"I not agree vid you at all, Monsieur Rivére, in your opinion. Men, at least Frenchmen, and I suppose dey do not differ much in dis particular from oder men, are very apt to get tired of de face dey may have looked at even half de number of years dat you have named. Den dey can make comparison between de face dey saw ven it vas young and beautiful, and de face dat is no longer so; and dis is very unfavourable to de old one. Anoder ting is, de two persons who have lived very many years togeder, know all de stories and anecdotes of each oder; and can no more amuse demselves in de long evenings by recounting dem.

But old people who have not passed deir youth togeder, have so many tings to tell, dat dey can amuse each oder very well. Dey have not learnt to get tired of each oder's long stories, often-repeated anecdotes, afflictions, and infirmities, de symptoms of which last, dey have learned to look on vid alarm, if not vid disgust. No, believe me, Monsieur Rivére, you are wrong in your opinion, and I tink *ce cher* Monsieur Vincent will agree in opinion vid me. *Après tout quel bel et bon homme est* Monsieur Vincent," resumed Madame de Stourville. " *Si aimable, si poli.* He took such good care of me on de sea—no, I never can forget it. And ven Monsieur Vincent did ask for *eau de vie* and varm vater for me, and *de bête de garçon* of de ship did call aloud, ' Is it for de young lady, or de old?' *quel imbécille n'est ce pas?* Monsieur Vincent vas very angry, and said, ' Here be no old ladies; vat you mean, *garçon*, by saying

such a ting?' *Oui, oui*, Monsieur Vincent so very angry, I tought he vould b at de stupid boy, and *pour dire vrai, il l'avait bien merité. Oui, certainement, Monsieur Vincent est un homme charmant.*"

Mr. Rivers gave me a significant look, and appeared highly amused at Madame de Stourville's evident *penchant* for our *ci-devant* cicerone.

Soon after Selina and Madame de Stourville had retired for the night, Mr. Vincent joined Mr. Rivers and me, to bid us farewell. His gratitude for the kindness we had shewn him, was really touching, and impressed us with a very favourable opinion of his heart.

When Madame de Stourville, next morning, discovered that Mr. Vincent was gone, her surprise was only to be equalled by her indignation.

"Vat he mean by not vaiting to say adieu? But de men are all de same. No hearts, no feelings. He is like de rest."

And here she cast an angry glance at Mr. Rivers. "Dey make de poor vomen believe dey lofes dem, and give de fond looks, and speak de mild, honey vords, and ven ve tink dey are *sur le point de faire la proposition de mariage*, dey eider say dey never did lofe de person, or dey go avay vidout so much as saying adieu."

It was impossible not to smile at the *naïveté* of the poor disappointed French woman; and even the beautiful lips of Selina relaxed into a movement more resembling a smile than they had worn since the death of Mr. Somers.

Often, during that journey, did I feel, that now, for the first time, I tasted happiness. To awake with the blissful certainty of seeing her, of conversing with her, on whom my soul doted, was in itself happiness; and as my eyes followed the carriage that contained her, and watched for each post where horses were changed, that I might

alight, to enjoy a few minutes of her society, the days glided away with a rapidity not to be described. Then, the repasts partaken together, the evenings passed seated by her side! Oh! that was indeed a happy journey!

While staying at Geneva, we went to the Magazine there, so celebrated for its *bijouterie*, and looking over the different *parures* displayed for our inspection, I opened one morocco case, believing it to contain some ornament, when my eye fell on a miniature, richly set, and I was instantly struck with the extraordinary likeness it bore to Miss Somers.

So strong was the resemblance, that were it not for the difference of dress, it might have passed for a portrait; and when I shewed it to Mr. Rivers and Madame de Stourville, they were equally struck with it. We questioned the jeweller as to whom the miniature belonged, and he informed us that it was the property of the Duc de Valen-

tinois, and had been consigned to him to be reset. This was all he knew, the miniature having been brought to him by a friend of the Duc's, with instructions to have it sent to Paris when set, where the Duc was now staying. Even the jeweller noticed the resemblance the portrait bore to Miss Somers, who herself acknowledged that she saw the likeness. What would I not have given to possess this miniature, or even a copy of it! When we escorted the ladies back to the hotel, I made an excuse to leave them, and returned to the jeweller's shop, in the hope of persuading him to let me have a copy taken of the portrait; but all my persuasions and offered bribes were vain; he positively refused, and I left his house much disappointed, while compelled to respect his integrity.

CHAPTER V.

A FEW days after our arrival at Paris, while walking one day in the *Jardin des Plantes*, with Selina and Madame de Stourville, our attention was excited by the extraordinary conduct of a gentleman, who passed and repassed us several times, peering in the face of Miss Somers, in a most remarkable manner. He was about fifty years of age, and so dignified and gentleman-like in his appearance, that his conduct seemed the more inexplicable. He examined Selina's face with an intenseness that amounted to positive

rudeness, and distressed her so much that I was on the point of requesting him to desist, when, taking off his hat and bowing to us, he begged to be pardoned for his apparent ill-breeding, but urged, as an excuse for it, that the very remarkable likeness the young lady bore to a dear friend of his, had made such a forcible impression on him, that he could not refrain from looking at her, and requested to be informed of her name and country.

We acquainted him with both, when he sighed deeply, and again apologized. I ventured to ask, in turn, his name; and when he said "Valentinois," we no longer felt surprised at his being struck by a resemblance that we had all remarked at Geneva. I mentioned the circumstance to him, and it seemed to give him pleasure.

"The portrait," said he, "is that of my wife, to whom this young lady bears so wonderful a likeness, that I could believe

that twenty years had flown away, and that my wife now stood before me, as she looked when I led her a bride to the altar. She blessed me with an only child, a girl, whom we lost, under circumstances so suspicious, that though her death was formally announced to us, we have never been able to abandon the hope that she may still be in existence. You may imagine, therefore, the effect and interest produced on my mind by beholding a young lady about the same age that my daughter would now have been, and above all, with so remarkable a likeness to my wife. I leave Paris, in a few days, for Milan, where the duchesse now is, but as it is our intention to visit England in a short time, perhaps I may be permitted to have the pleasure—a melancholy one, though, it must be—of presenting this young lady to her?"

I gave my address to the Duc de Valentinois, adding that, through me, he might

always become acquainted with the residence of Miss Somers; and he took his leave, casting many a "longing, lingering look behind," on the fair young face that had so much attracted his attention.

"What a fine, intelligent countenance he has," said Selina; "and what a pleasing-toned voice, and dignified manner! It may seem strange, and somewhat romantic, too, nevertheless, I confess that the Duc de Valentinois has greatly interested me; and if the duchess is as amiable as he is, I am sure I should like her."

"He is very vell, very vell," observed Madame de Stourville. "De Italian *noblesse* are, however, far inferior to de French. A French, and, above all, a Parisian nobleman, vould have paid a compliment to each of us, and turned it vid dat elegance and grace dat only Frenchmen possess. But dis Italian *duc* was so rude as not to seem to notice dat I vas present;

and ven he spoke of de likeness of Mademoiselle to his vife, he had not de *politesse* to say dat de resemblance vas very flattering for Madame la Duchesse. No, no, dere is no *noblesse* to be compared vid de French; and no men to be found who have, in an equal degree, *de politesse pour les dames.*"

Every hour passed in the society of Selina served to rivet still more closely the bonds of affection that united me to her. Nor did she—now that she felt convinced that the knowledge of the alleged unworthiness of her mother, and the reprehensible conduct of her father, had only rendered me more anxious to call her mine, and thus withdraw her wholly from the power of her sole surviving parent—attempt to conceal that my fervent attachment and devotion had won her affection. Her manner towards me was as free from the prudery so often assumed by some young ladies under similar

circumstances, as from the freedom that characterizes others. Her delicacy and modesty were a part of herself, and invested her with an irresistible charm in my eyes; while they lent to every little favour she accorded me, a value appreciated only by those who know how to prize even the merest trifles connected with a pure-minded and innocent creature, who loves for the first time. I could have wished that our travelling might continue for months; and a gloom pervaded my mind as we approached the period of its termination. Once arrived in London, she must be given up to the guardianship of the Court of Chancery; and an undefined dread of some obstacle being opposed to our union, would, in spite of all my efforts to check it, depress my spirits. I was to be of age in a week, and was determined to lay my proposals in due form before the proper authorities; but I feared that the youth of Selina, who was now

only in her eighteenth year, might be made an objection to the fulfilment of my hopes; and this foreboding haunted me. It was therefore with a feeling of sadness that I greeted the white cliffs of Dover, and conducted my beloved Selina to the best inn that town boasts. My sadness was infectious, for she too became grave and pensive; and this, the first evening that we had passed together in our native land, was the most melancholy we had known since we had left Naples.

The following day we proceeded to London, and took up our abode in an hotel well known to Mr. Rivers, who the next morning sent for the solicitor of my family, to consult on the steps to be taken for fulfilling the instructions of Mr. Somers. The will of that gentleman was delivered to the proper authorities, and Mr. Rivers attended Selina and Madame de Stourville to Mr. Herbert, the Master in the Court of Chan-

cery before whom they were to appear. The youth, beauty, and peculiar position of Selina greatly interested that gentleman. He inquired of Mr. Rivers whether she had any relations to whose care the Court of Chancery might entrust her; adding, that the will of the deceased prohibited her being allowed to reside with her mother. When told that Mr. Rivers or the young lady knew of none, the Master deemed it expedient that, for the present, she should remain under the protection of the female companion to whose care she had been entrusted by her father, and advised a private residence being taken for her.

"The young lady is heiress to a very large fortune," said he, "and a suitable allowance will be immediately granted by the Court for her maintenance while she is a minor. Mr. Mellingcourt was an eccentric man, and since his separation from

the Lady Selina his wife, his habits have been still more so."

"I was not aware until this moment," observed Mr. Rivers, "that the gentleman with whose will I was entrusted by the English Consul at Naples, and with whom I had some personal intercourse in Palermo, had any other name than Somers, which was that he was known by there, as well as in France."

"Yes, sir, that was only an assumed name, and Mellingcourt was the real one. He married Lady Selina, the sister of the Marquis of Altringham, lately dead."

When Mr. Rivers, Selina, and Madame de Stourville returned from their interview with the Master in Chancery, I felt as overjoyed to see my beloved as if we had been days instead of a few hours asunder.

"You must make up your mind to resign Miss Somers," said Mr. Rivers, endeavouring to look grave.

"Yes, you will see Mademoiselle Somers no more!" observed Madame de Stourville.

"Good heavens! What does all this mean?" demanded I, really alarmed, which Mr. Rivers observing, he kindly said,

"Not to keep you in suspense, this young lady," turning to Selina, "is no longer Miss Somers, but Miss Mellingcourt, daughter of Mr. and Lady Selina Mellingcourt, niece to the late Marquis of Altringham, and first cousin to the present."

I felt a shock at this intelligence, the symptoms of which I could not, despite my utmost efforts, conceal. And how were my sufferings increased, by observing that Selina had noticed the sudden revulsion produced by her new cognomen. She turned alternately from pale to red; and notwithstanding that I immediately took her hand, and declared that by any name she would be equally dear to me, I marked with pain that her feelings were wounded. So many

disagreeable associations were revived in my mind by the name of Mellingcourt,—that name, borne by one who had caused so much sorrow to my dear, sainted mother, that it never could have been heard by me without painful emotions. But to learn that the person now dearest to me on earth bore it, and, above all, that she was the daughter of a woman whom I heartily contemned and despised, was indeed a severe trial. True, I was already aware that the mother of Selina was a most objectionable character. I had heard her husband denounce her to be such, even in the presence of her innocent child; and I had marked with disgust the effrontery, and absence of all contrition or shame, which she had evinced on that memorable occasion. Lady Selina Mellingcourt could certainly be no worse than I believed the mother of Selina to be; nevertheless, I now experienced a stronger sentiment of distaste and repug-

nance to her whose arts had embittered the life of my dear mother, and whose *liaison* with my father had led to the event which caused his death, than I had previously entertained towards the supposed Mrs. Lindsell. And it was to the daughter of this bad woman that I had irrevocably linked my destiny; and that daughter was to sit in my sainted mother's place at my home—that home which had been defiled by the guilt and open exposure of her mother. All these reflections rushed through my mind, and I involuntarily shuddered; but recalled to the actual present by hearing Mr. Rivers ask Selina whether she was not ill, I turned, and saw her pale as marble, her lovely face bearing such an expression of sorrow and mild resignation, that I forgot everything but that she was suffering,—and from no fault of hers; and I addressed her with the utmost tenderness.

There was a purity, an innocence, and, I

might say, a holiness—for surely purity and innocence constitute some of the attributes of holiness—about this charming girl, that no one could look on her without feeling their blessed influence; and as I gazed on that pale but sweet face, that polished and lofty brow, where virtue seemed to have set its seal, and those lips, that bore the impress of truth, I felt abashed that I could for a moment have wished that our destinies had not been irrevocably linked together. Was she to be blamed or shunned for the sins of her mother? Was she not, on the contrary, more an object of interest and commiseration on that account? and had she not virtues that might redeem and atone for all her mother's faults? These were the questions I asked myself as I contemplated that beautiful face; and Love answered—Yes, and hushed every doubt to rest.

But though in the presence of Selina I

could forget all that was painful, and think only of the happiness of calling such a creature mine,—when absent from her, when removed from the magical influence which her beauty and innocence exercised over me, a thousand painful doubts and fears would return to haunt my pillow, and to poison my repose. I dared not to whisper, even to myself, the fearful thoughts that suggested themselves to me,—thoughts too horrible to be for a moment entertained without shuddering. Yet they would again present themselves to me when away from her, again to be chased when I beheld her face, as the dark mists of night are cleared away by the bright beams of the rising sun.

The Master in Chancery, a kind-hearted man, feeling for the isolation of the rich heiress, and desirous to lessen it, brought his wife and daughters to visit her. She

was invited to their house, and treated with a cordiality that greatly increased as they learned to form a due appreciation of her character.

CHAPTER VI.

And now I attained my majority, Lord Warminster, my guardian, came up to London for the occasion—an exertion of which he left nothing unsaid that could enhance the value of such a sacrifice on his part, or increase my sense of it. With the possession of my ancestral estates, as well as a very large sum, the savings of my minority, I found myself one of the richest commoners in England. I had long intended that the anniversary of my twenty-first birthday should be spent at Meredith

Park, and that my betrothed bride and Madame de Stourville should be present. I had often talked this little plan over with Selina on our route from Italy, and she had entered into it with all the delight with which its anticipation filled me. I had told her that we should together visit the rooms sacred to my mother's use, and afterwards kneel by her tomb to implore a blessing on our intended union. This proof of affection and sentiment had greatly touched her; and she loved to question me about my mother, listening with deep attention to every little particular I related, and by her sweet and tender sympathy identifying herself in my heart with the memory of my lost mother. Ever since the discovery of her real name, an instinctive feeling that I could not conquer made me avoid recurring to this subject, which had previously been a frequent one, and when she referred to it, I quickly changed the topic.

As the day that completed my majority had gone by, Selina reminded me of it, and expressed her satisfaction at the thoughts of soon seeing the house in which I had first beheld the light. I felt embarrassed, and my countenance and manner betrayed my uneasiness. "I have abandoned the project," replied I; "for the house is not in order, and I would rather you did not visit it until you enter as its mistress." I could perceive that she was surprised and disappointed; but such was the sweetness of her temper and gentleness of her manner, that a stranger could not have discerned it. I was pained to have thwarted her; but how could I take her to Meredith Park while she bore the hateful name of Mellingcourt—a name but too well remembered, by all the gossips in the neighbourhood, as identified with the painful *esclandre* in which her mother enacted so prominent a part? How kneel with her beside the tomb of that beloved

mother, who, could she behold us from her grave, would exhort me not to wed the daughter of the woman who had ruined her peace, dishonoured her roof, and led to the death of her husband! There was sacrilege in the thought. No, I would as soon as possible marry her, and sink the name so odious to me in my own; and then, and not till then, could I take her to Meredith Park; for then, as my wife, I might hope for the forbearance of my neighbours, if not for their oblivion of the notoriety attached to her mother in the very abode where the daughter was now to preside.

Two days after that which completed my majority, that epoch which was to have been one of rejoicing, opened gloomily, and brought me the intelligence of the death of my poor mother's old and faithful attendant, Lockly. She had been ill for some weeks, and, as the steward wrote, had prayed to be spared to see her dear master once more; but two

days previous to the date of his letter she breathed her last, imploring blessings on my head, and requesting that her remains should be interred at the foot of the tomb of her honoured lady. When the first natural regret at this event had subsided,—and it took some hours before I could subdue the sadness it occasioned me,—I could not help reverting to what would have been the horror and dismay of poor Lockly had she lived to behold the daughter of the woman she had most hated on earth, arrive to fill her dear lady's place at Meredith Park. It was almost a relief to me to know that she was spared this grief, and that I was saved the annoyance of seeing her avert her eye from the face of my fair bride, and glance reproaches at me, for what she would have called insulting my mother's memory.

When I went to call on Selina, I found her pale and dispirited, and although she endeavoured to banish her sadness when

congratulating me on my birthday, the effort was too much for her, and she burst into tears. Madame de Stourville, who was always present at our interviews, and who was aware of our engagement, had the discretion to look out of one of the windows while I tried to soothe and speak comfort to my poor Selina. I entreated, I implored her to tell me the cause of her tears; but they fell so plenteously, that for some time she could not speak. How my heart reproached me as I saw those pearly drops chase each other down her pale cheeks, and marked her beautiful breast rise and fall with each long-drawn sob, that seemed to come from her heart. I felt, with self-reproach, that some alteration in my manner, of which, however I might be unconscious, had been noticed by her, and had caused the sorrow I now witnessed. It was not until I had repeatedly implored her, that she revealed to me that she had observed that ever since the day I had learnt her

real name, my manner towards her had changed. That she had tried to think this might only be a fancy of hers, but that every interview with me convinced her more fully of the fact. My silence, my abstraction, the start I had given when I heard the name, had all been noted down by this sensitive and lovely creature; and I, fool that I was, could imagine that in a love like ours there could be so great a want of sympathy as that she should not have remarked—nay, more, have *felt* what was passing in my mind.

"When assured, by your undiminished attention and often-reiterated proposal for my hand," said Selina, "that the terrible scene of recrimination at Palermo, which must have greatly pained your feelings, while it so deeply lacerated mine, had not created any change in your sentiments for me, I believed that the worst having been

revealed by my father, nothing remained to be discovered that could effect any alteration in your sentiments. Nevertheless, I had many scruples respecting the propriety of accepting your hand since I became aware of the—the——" and the lovely girl's hitherto pale face was in a moment covered with blushes, as she added, "the stain on my unhappy mother's fame."

"Say no more, dearest, most beloved Selina!" interrupted I; "my affection, my devotion for you are unchanged, and unchangeable. Never were you more loved—nay, more, so ineffably dear to my heart, or so necessary to my existence as at this moment, and never did I so fondly long to call you mine. Circumstances too tedious, and now unnecessary to relate, had affected my spirits on the day when your present name was made known to me. Let us refer to this subject no more, and be assured, my beloved,

my adored Selina, that my every dream, my every hope, of happiness depends on your sweet self!"

The tenderness and earnestness of my manner re-assured her, that fair and exquisitely formed little hand was yielded to mine, and as I pressed it fondly to my lips, I forgot every care, and abandoned my heart to the fond illusions of hope. The rest of that day was unclouded by a single shade of doubt or gloom. Selina's paleness and sadness were replaced by a delicate tint of rose, and a chastened cheerfulness, that delighted me by proving the depth of her attachment to me, as exemplified in the change so quickly wrought in her appearance and spirits, by my assurances of unimpaired affection.

Mr. Herbert and his family were constant in their attention to Selina. Scarcely a day passed in which the ladies did not visit her, or in which she was not invited

to their house. Mr. Rivers and I were frequent guests at this worthy man's table, where a cordial yet refined hospitality prevailed, too often found wanting in statelier dwellings. And now, with Selina's permission, I disclosed my attachment to this, her legal guardian; laid before him the state of my fortune, and solicited his sanction to my addresses. He represented the youthfulness of both parties as an objection, and urged the propriety of our waiting until Selina became of age.

"Wait three years!" exclaimed I. "Impossible!"

"And what is there so impossible in it?" demanded he, smiling. "Three years, interminable as such a period may seem to a young gentleman desperately in love, and who has but just completed his majority, is, after all, no very distant period, and with the power of seeing the object of his affection, it appears to me that such a probationary

trial of love and constancy may, with the exertion of a little philosophy, be patiently borne."

"So you may now think," answered I, somewhat petulantly; "but did you think so when you wished to marry your amiable and excellent lady?"

He again smiled, shook his head, and said, "No, I confess I then felt as you do at present. Nevertheless, I was compelled to wait not merely three, but five years, before her father would accord me her hand. 'When you have acquired distinction in your profession, and have by your practice an income adequate to support a wife, and provide for a family in a style of comfort such as that to which my daughter has been hitherto accustomed,' said the prudent father; 'you shall have her. If she be not worth the pain of waiting so long for her, your heart will not suffer much for the trial; but if she be, your affection will only serve

as a spur to exertion in your profession, and your success will be the more gratifying to you both, because achieved through such a motive.' We had no alternative but to submit, and we did it with the best grace we could. I worked hard, for the object in view cheered my labours, and precluded that weariness and lassitude into which, during the first years of a young, and for some time briefless barrister, he is but too apt to sink. I was permitted to be a frequent guest at my future father-in-law's. My love of literature and taste for the fine arts was kept alive and fostered by the happy evenings spent in a family where both were cultivated. Mary was indefatigable at her pencil and embroidery, in order to decorate with the result of her labours our future home, and I never passed a book-stall without picking up some good volumes towards the formation of a library for it. This future home terminated the fairest vista of our view. To it

we continually referred, with increasing pleasure, and when at length my perseverance and arduous labour enabled me to claim their reward, the extended period during which it had been longed for, enhanced, rather than decreased our sense of the inestimable value of the blessing. When witnessing our happiness at the first dinner given by us to my wife's family, her father observed, 'Well, Robert, do you now forgive me for making you wait five years for Mary? Look around you, and behold the comfort and elegances of life which this wise postponement of your marriage has enabled you to secure for her; and the tasteful decorations which it gave her time and leisure to complete for your home. Had I consented to yield to your impatience, how different might you now find your dwelling. Young and improvident, you would have had to struggle with a scanty income, and all the privations it entails. The cares attending a *ménage* with

narrow means to support it would have disheartened and damped your exertions, and the sight of Mary deprived of those comforts to which from infancy she had been accustomed, would have pained and distressed you. Some three or four little ones (for they always come in troops to those who can the least afford to maintain them) would have multiplied your cares, and Mary, the now healthy, blooming bride, would, in all human probability, have degenerated into a sickly mother, the result of being a nurse and a household drudge.' Such, my young friend, was the reasoning of my good father-in-law; and I have never had the least cause to impugn its wisdom."

CHAPTER VII.

I HAD impatiently listened to the long exordium of the excellent Master-in-Chancery, who loved to hear himself talk, and who was somewhat tedious in delivering his practical essays on prudence. No sooner had he ended, than I observed, that the example he had quoted did not apply to me. "I have no profession to follow, have a fortune to satisfy even the most expensive tastes," said I; "so that the prudence of waiting three years, as far as regards pecuniary considerations, I cannot see."

"In that point, certainly," replied he, "I admit that there is no occasion. But are there not others quite as important? Look around you, and contemplate the general result of early marriages. Young men spoilt by self-indulgence, who never having denied themselves aught that wealth can produce, and totally ignorant of the duties and grave responsibility of the married state, encounter some fair and youthful creature, but a few months emancipated from the dull school-room in papa's mansion, and under the influence of the first enchantment of being well-dressed, seen, and admired. He fancies himself desperately in love, and this often from a mere ball-room-acquaintance with the object of his passion. She, like all young creatures on first entering society, is grateful to him who first distinguishes her from the crowd of female competitors around her; and the complacency of manner originating in satisfied vanity,

her admirer immediately attributes to affection for himself. He proposes, is at once accepted, because papas and mammas too well know the difficulty of procuring good *partis*, for their daughters to risk a refusal. The boy and girl are wedded; are foolishly fond during the first three months; and become somewhat indifferent the next three. At the end of the year, he has grown to think the jealous wife who reproaches him for not loving her as much as he did eleven months before, as unlike the blooming sylph crowned by a garland of roses less beautiful than her cheeks, and whom it was rapture to gaze on, as it is possible for two women to be; and she begins to acknowledge that the neglectful husband who scarcely conceals his indifference, is a much less charming man than the enamoured youth who had sworn that she surpassed all women, and that his love would end but with life."

"This may be very true, but is not at all

applicable to Miss Mellingcourt (the name always stuck in my throat) and me," observed I, not a little piqued by the implied comparison. "I have had the advantages of a rational education, and, though young, have seen more of the world than most men of my age. I believe I may without vanity say, that I have not been spoilt by the self-indulgence ordinarily practised by my contemporaries, for I have had the advantage of living with Mr. Rivers, whose example and precepts have not, I trust, been lost on me. Opportunity has been afforded me to become acquainted with the rare mental qualities of Miss Mellingcourt, and you will, I am sure, readily admit that she bears no resemblance to the begarlanded sylph of the ball-room to whom you referred."

"Nay, I see you are piqued, my young friend; forgive me if I have offended. I readily acknowledge that you and Miss Mellingcourt are indeed very different to

the examples I have cited; nevertheless, I cannot help thinking that, however great the superiority, it would be infinitely more prudent to postpone the marriage until Miss Mellingcourt becomes of age."

"You have yourself, my dear sir, lamented to Mr. Rivers the peculiar and isolated position of this young lady," said I. "Heiress to a large fortune, and almost an orphan, — her father having, as you are aware, by his will prohibited her from holding any intercourse with her mother,—with no relations on her father's side, and wholly unknown to those with whom she might claim kindred on her mother's, the sooner she finds a legal protector of suitable station and fortune to her own, the better. To prevent the possibility of any suspicion of my being influenced by mercenary motives, —although her great personal and mental attractions, as well as my own large estates, might preclude any such charge, it is my

desire that the whole of Miss Mellingcourt's fortune should be settled on herself, free from any control of mine."

"Nothing can be more disinterested, my dear Mr. Meredith; and all I can say is, that no effort of mine shall be wanting to obtain the sanction of the Lord Chancellor to the marriage. Nor do I anticipate any great difficulty, your station, character, and opulence, rendering you, in every point of view, so eligible a match. Of course, you do not mean to urge that the marriage should take place before six months have elapsed since the demise of her father? It would be indecorous, and would prejudice your suit with the Lord Chancellor."

I assented to the propriety of this observation; and the worthy Master in Chancery and I were from that day forth, not merely acquaintances, but cordial friends. I was constantly invited to meet my beloved Selina at his house; and she became so

much attached to his amiable wife and daughter, that much of her time, and consequently mine, was spent in their society.

The Lord Chancellor, owing to the representations of the worthy Master, sanctioned my addresses, and consented that at the expiration of the six months we should be united. Those were happy days! I rose in the morning with the blissful certainty of meeting in a few hours the dear object who occupied all my thoughts; and when I parted from her in the evening, I longed for the hour when I should again behold her. No one who has not passionately loved can imagine the delight of being permitted to administer to the happiness of such a creature as Selina. To know that my presence never failed to bring the roses to her delicate checks, and a smile to her beautiful lips; to have the bouquets of flowers, I daily brought her, treasured as if they were her most precious possessions; to

study my taste, and mine only, in the selection of her dress, and to take an interest even in trifles when she saw that they were not indifferent to me. Such was the happiness that was mine for months, with the prospect of a still greater happiness in perspective—that of calling this lovely and beloved creature my own. No wonder, then, that each day bringing to light some new charm in the disposition and mind of Selina, I should feel my attachment to her increasing, until I doated on her to a degree that never man before had experienced! And she, far from being spoilt by my idolatry, was so free from the spirit of coquetry and caprice by which so many youthful beauties are actuated, that the more my devotion to her became apparent, the less did she presume upon it, her whole study being to prove her desire of contributing to my happiness, and assimilating herself to my tastes and habits. While employed at her

pencil or embroidering frame, I would for hours read aloud to her, admiring from time to time the bright creations of those delicate and taper fingers; or I would hang delighted over her, as she drew from her piano-forte the most dulcet sounds, and accompanied them by a voice whose melody and expression were unrivalled.

The worthy Mr. Herbert and his family would sometimes accept my invitations to spend a day at Windsor or Richmond, and my Selina took great pleasure in those excursions, being passionately fond of the country. Mr. Rivers was much esteemed by the whole circle; and although the national prejudices, and the weakness of character of Madame de Stourville, sometimes drew on her a smile in which there was perhaps more of ridicule than approbation, her goodness of heart and simplicity, as well as her devotion to Selina, endeared her to us all.

"And all you English tink Richmont such very *charmant* place!"—would she say, when we were contemplating with delight the enchanting view from Richmond Hill. "*Eh bien!* for my part, I see noting in it so very fine. De environs of Paris have fifty places much finer. De Bois de Boulogne, *par exemple*. Tell me, vhat vould Richmont be vidout de hills, de trees, de verdure, and de vater? Vy, noting at all. *Oui, oui*, take avay de leetle hills, de trees, de verdure, and de vater, and de place vill be noting at all" — an assertion, the truth of which none of us could contest, and our admission of which rendered Madame de Stourville perfectly triumphant.

So necessary was the daily presence of Selina to my happiness, that it was with difficulty I could tear myself from London, even for two or three days, to superintend

the improvements carrying into execution at Meredith Park, in order to render it worthy for her reception.

My first visit to that

"Seat of my youth, when every sport could please,"

was attended with melancholy feelings. Every object there vividly recalled my beloved mother to my memory; and as I stood gazing on her portrait, I could almost have fancied that the soft, pensive eyes looked reproachingly at me; and that could those dear lips, that in life had ever a smile for me, have opened, they would have asked me why I had selected the daughter of her most cruel enemy for my wife. When I bent over her tomb, too, my feelings were no longer those of pure, unalloyed regret. A consciousness that I was about to do that which, had she lived, would have pained and wounded her, haunted me; and instead of, as formerly, finding resignation from re-

flecting that I had never offended or grieved her, I left the sacred spot as sad as when I had approached it.

I sought relief from such thoughts by devoting my attention to the decoration of the rooms to be appropriated to my bride. Those that had been occupied by my dear mother, I determined should be left as when she lived; for in them every object spoke to me of her, and I should have thought it little less than sacrilege to have changed them. All that wealth could command and taste dictate was lavished on Selina's apartments. The state rooms and library were also newly furnished; and as I wandered from chamber to chamber I invoked the presence of the beautiful being to please whom the decorations were designed, and longed for the hour that was to see her established at Meredith Park as its mistress.

CHAPTER VIII.

With what eagerness did I return to London after a three days' absence, and hurry to the abode of my betrothed! And oh! the joy of seeing her eyes sparkle with pleasure, and her cheeks glow with blushes, when I entered. We felt as if, instead of three days, we had been as many months asunder; we had so many questions to ask, and so many details to give relative to our pursuits and thoughts during our brief separation.

And now the day approached that was to bless me with the hand of my lovely Selina.

Every preparation was completed, and the bridal gifts suitable to the idol at whose shrine they were to be offered up covered the tables in the rooms of my hotel. The finest diamonds, the rarest rubies, emeralds, sapphires, and pearls, set in every imaginable shape and ornament, appeared to me scarcely worthy of her for whom they were intended, and while she blamed me for their quantity and costliness, I was dissatisfied that they were not still more splendid.

It was arranged that Mr. Herbert and his family, with Madame de Stourville and Mr. Rivers, should be the only persons present at the nuptial ceremony. The two last named were to remain in London for ten days, and at the expiration of that time were to join us at Meredith Park, accompanied by Mr. Herbert, his wife, and daughter, who had promised to stay with us for a fortnight.

The jewellers, coachmaker, and milliners employed for the marriage, had, according to the usual custom on similar occasions, exhibited their different productions to many of their customers. Hence the approaching event became a topic of conversation; and two days previous to that fixed for its celebration, more than one paragraph, headed "Marriage in High Life," announced that Harry Meredith, Esq., of Meredith Park, who had succeeded to, and lately taken possession of, the large estates of his father, was on Wednesday to lead to the hymeneal altar the lovely and accomplished Miss Mellingcourt, sole daughter and heiress to the immense wealth of the late Marmaduke Mellingcourt, Esq.

I felt displeased as I read this and similar paragraphs in the papers on my breakfast table; for I shrank with distaste from the publicity thus afforded to a ceremony at which it could not fail to congregate a

gaping crowd of idlers, from whose gaze I knew my blushing bride would fain escape. But I was glad, that in the announcement no mention of Lady Selina Mellingcourt was made; and I hurried off to the abode of Selina, my carriage literally laden with cases of jewels, Cashmeres, and foreign laces,—in the selection of which last I had been assisted by the knowledge and taste of Madame de Stourville, who was a professed judge in such matters. I found my Selina cheerful; but a maidenly reserve and timidity, never absent from her, and now increased by the proximity of that event which was to consign her for ever to my care, rendered her more lovely in my eyes than ever. I opened jewel-case after jewel-case, and as their bright contents flashed with a thousand varied dyes, I was like a delighted schoolboy who exhibits the presents brought for the object of his first juvenile love. But while Madame de Stour-

ville was loud and lavish in exclamations of *beau*, *superbe*, *magnifique*, divine, and incomparable, my beautiful Selina's equanimity was unchanged. She admired the costly presents before her more as being *my* gifts than for their own intrinsic lustre, and while I placed wreaths of rubies and diadems of pearls and diamonds one after another on her exquisitely shaped head, and clasped strings of large Oriental pearls and diamond necklaces in succession around her snowy throat, she turned not to the mirror to see their dazzling effect, as most other fair creatures of her age would have done, but raised her beautiful eyes to mine as if to ask how I could be occupied with such trifles, when she thought only of the solemn ceremony that was to unite us indissolubly the next day. There was something so calm, so holy about her, that I laid aside the jewels to contemplate that pure and lovely countenance to which no extraneous ornament could add new

charms; and as I gazed on her, and met her mild and thoughtful eyes, mine became moist, while tears rushed into hers, and she held out her beautiful little hand to me, and whispered, "They are tears of happiness."

I lingered near her long after the usual hour for returning to my hotel, to dress for dinner. I felt as unwilling to leave her presence as if I were on the point of setting out on a long journey away from her; and Madame de Stourville had more than thrice chidden and reminded me that dinner (a serious affair in her estimation) would be spoilt, before I could tear myself away. When, at length, I seized my hat and reached the door of the *salon*, I looked back to have one more glance of my adored Selina, I caught a glance of such deep tenderness from her, that I again returned to snatch her dear hand, and cover it with kisses. Was it some prophetic feeling that rendered

me thus unwilling to quit her presence on that eventful day? Often and often did I recall that parting to my mind, and acknowledge that a presentiment of evil must have haunted us both, to have rendered it so solemn, when we believed that in an hour we should again meet.

On ascending the stairs at my hotel, my servant told me that for the last hour a lady had been waiting in the drawing-room, to see me; and that she said her business was of so urgent a nature that she wished me to be sent for. I felt discomposed and annoyed at this interruption, when I had barely time to dress and hurry back to my Selina.

"Say that I cannot be seen, that I am particularly occupied," replied I.

"The lady stated, sir, that her business was of such importance to *you*, that it could not be postponed; and then, sir, there is something about her appearance and

manner that checked me from refusing to let her wait."

A vague and undefined dread of something unpleasant crossed my mind, as my servant ceased speaking, but this very presentiment of evil nerved me with courage to encounter it at once, so I advanced hurriedly, and entered the *salon*. Never shall I forget the horror of that moment, when my eyes fell on the face of her whom I now knew to be Lady Selina Mellingcourt, the mother of Selina. One glance at her prepared me for evil tidings; and my countenance revealed my feelings. She arose, and approaching me, said, "My presence here must, I well know, be anything but agreeable to you, Mr. Meredith: and I will not attempt to deny that our meeting is so fraught with pain to myself that nothing short of dire necessity and the emergency of the crisis in which we stand could have

compelled me to seek it. It was only recently that I learned the death of my late husband. The intelligence found me so ill, that although most anxious to seek my daughter, of whom I had become the only natural protectress, I was unable to leave my bed. I set out long before my physician considered me in a fit state to undertake such a voyage and journey. I have traced her from Naples, through France, to England. At Dover, I read in a newspaper, that to-morrow you were to become her husband, and I instantly set out, though nearly exhausted by fatigue, in order to stop this unhallowed, this unnatural union."

Here she hid her face in her handkerchief, and sank into a chair, seemingly overcome by her emotions.

"And why unhallowed—why unnatural, Madam?" demanded I, sternly, though I trembled while I spoke. "My birth, fortune, and station, render me in every way

an eligible husband for Miss Mellingcourt. She is a ward of chancery, and those competent to decide on the point have sanctioned our union."

"Never, never can it take place!" said she, nearly convulsed with emotion. "Oh! Mr. Meredith, how can I, how dare I, confess what it humiliates, what it tortures me to reveal; but which, to prevent sin and guilt, I must avow. The parent to whom you owe existence was—— was also the father of Selina!"

She hid her face in her hands; and I, overcome by the dreadful shock, my limbs trembling, and my brain almost maddened, dropped into a chair, and groaned aloud. We were both speechless for some minutes, for I was so stunned by the death-blow to all my happiness, that the power of utterance was denied me, and she appeared unable to speak. A thought flashed through my mind. What if this terrible assertion of

hers was a falsehood, invented to break off my marriage with Selina, in the hope of, in some way or other, getting her into her own power, and so enabling her to extort money from her. This thought gave me a momentary courage, and endeavouring to assume a composure I was far from feeling, I observed to her, that it was strange that it was only now this confession had been made. I added, too, that I disbelieved it altogether.

"Why should it have been sooner made? Would you have had me denounce my dishonour and his own, to Mr. Mellingcourt?" demanded Lady Selina, angrily. "There was, however, but little necessity for my avowal, for he always disbelieved that the child was his, and refused to see me after its birth. Why you should doubt the truth of the confession it has cost me such pain and shame to make, I know not; but your father, had he lived, could not have denied it, and unhappily for my honour, the attach-

ment which so long subsisted between us, was but too well, and too generally known, to leave much doubt of the fact I have stated. Would that I were not compelled to dash the cup of happiness from your lips, and those of my daughter! You do not, you cannot conjecture what the step I have taken has cost me; but it was inevitable; and however much of humiliation it has entailed on me, I have the consolation of having fulfilled my duty."

"Truly has it been said," exclaimed I, with bitterness, "that the sins of the parents are visited on the children! You have for ever destroyed the peace of two innocent beings, who, had it not been for your guilt, might have enjoyed the purest happiness."

"Is it manly, is it Christian-like in you, Mr. Meredith, to reproach me with the sins of my youth? and at such a moment, too, when overpowered by my feelings! I—I," and here she covered her face with her

handkerchief, and wept. I attempted not to soothe her, for so great was the horror and dislike with which she inspired me, that such an effort would have been impracticable.

CHAPTER IX.

I LEFT the room in a state of mind impossible to describe, and sought my own chamber, but there every object on which my eyes glanced tended to increase my grief and despair. The tables, and even the chairs, were covered with boxes and cases designed for Selina, and which had been sent home since I had left the hotel in the morning. Everything bore the appearance of preparation for the morrow's ceremony and journey, and now—oh! how changed—how wretched was all. What was I to do—

where was I to go? To see Selina again was impossible! to write to her I felt to be equally so. And yet, could I leave her ignorant of the fearful, the impassable barrier that had sprung up to divide us for ever? Could I allow her to believe that on the very eve of our nuptials I had basely deserted her, without a word to account for such a step? To think was madness! Whichever way my mind turned, despair met me at every side; and yet, even in that terrible hour, fondly—madly as I loved her, I would better have borne my own wretchedness, could I have diminished hers. The thought of her sorrow—that sorrow I must not soothe—unmanned me; and tears—burning tears—flowed from my eyes.

Mr. Rivers knocked at my door, being ready dressed to accompany me to Selina. His astonishment at beholding my state, and his warm sympathy when acquainted with its cause, I shall never forget.

"You are at this moment, my poor friend, incapable of thinking or acting for yourself," said he. "Let me implore you to go to bed. Your hand burns, and your temples throb! I know I shall be most likely to meet your wishes by attending to *one* whose feelings everything must be done to spare."

I grasped his hand, but I could not speak.

"I will go to her and break this terrible event by stating that you are taken suddenly ill, and unable to leave your bed. Thence I shall proceed to our worthy Master in Chancery, to whom I will relate the truth. To guard against this bad woman's forcing herself into the presence of her daughter, I will advise the Master to engage Miss Mellingcourt to remove to his house for the present. Then you, my dear friend, and I, will decide whither we shall repair; for I conclude that you will be

anxious to leave London as soon as possible."

"Yes, go, go to her at once," said I. "Oh! Mr. Rivers, shall I ever, in the course of years, acquire sufficient calmness to see her again—to look on her in the new light in which I must henceforth regard her? Oh! my father, how have your sins been visited on your unhappy son! The same unworthy woman whose conduct led to your premature death, and destroyed the life of my poor mother, has now for ever ruined my peace!"

Before Mr. Rivers left my chamber, he administered an opiate to me, but it failed to procure me a moment's repose. I desired my servant to request Mr. Rivers to come to me as soon as he returned to the hotel, and I impatiently counted the moments until he arrived. When he entered he looked pale and harassed.

"Is my——is she well?" exclaimed I.

"She was greatly alarmed and agitated about your illness. But why should I speak to you on this subject? All recurrence to it must be avoided, until you can think of her as a sister."

"Yes, you are right. I will question you no more. But is it not dreadful to have the whole current of one's thoughts and feelings thus violently checked? Oh! Mr. Rivers, bear with my weakness! But I think I should have better endured to have had her snatched from me by death, with the power of dwelling, with all the love I have entertained for her, on the recollection of our mutual tenderness, than to be thus debarred from even this sad relief, and to know that it is a sin, a crime, to indulge such feelings. But let me at least hear that she will be safe from the intrusion of that woman!"

"You may be assured that she will. The Master in Chancery, after a long consulta-

tion, advised me, as knowing Miss Mellingcourt longer and better than he did, to break to her that her mother was in London, and would, in all probability, endeavour to obtain admission into the house; and that it would be much better to avoid all intercourse with her. The alarm she evinced at the bare mention of her name, or the possibility of falling into her power, enabled me to suggest to her the eligibility of placing herself at once under the protection of the Master in Chancery. She assented to my proposition; and to his residence will, with Madame de Stourville, go early to-morrow. 'Oh! Mr. Rivers,' said the poor young lady, 'do not think me cruel and unnatural for thus entertaining such a dread, such an unconquerable repugnance to my—mother. But, indeed I cannot help it; although I often reproach myself for the culpable aversion I experience."

To know that Selina would be safe from the power and intrusion of her unworthy mother was indeed a consolation to my feelings; and I allowed Mr. Rivers to retire, promising him that I would seek repose. But the promise was easier made than kept; and, as hour after hour was tolled by a neighbouring clock, I lay awake, with throbbing temples and quick-beating pulse, ruminating on the misery of the present, and dreading to anticipate the dreary, hopeless future.

The morning broke,—that morning so impatiently desired, and which was to have made me the happiest of men,—and it found me in a violent brain fever.

For many days did I linger on the verge of death, totally unconscious of all that was passing around me. But even this state brought no oblivion to the one terrible thought that had tortured my heart, and driven reason from my brain; for I raved incessantly of Selina, until, exhausted by

the violence of my emotions, I sank into a death-like stupor, in which I remained for several hours. During many weeks, my life was despaired of; and when at length youth and a strong constitution enabled me to struggle through my disease, such was the state of debility it left behind, that it was long ere my physicians could assure Mr. Rivers, who scarcely left my bedside during my illness, that I should eventually recover. Physical sufferings, particularly those of a protracted nature, which weaken the frame, have a great influence in calming the passions, although they cannot vanquish affection. Mine for Selina was so interwoven with my very being, that death only could conquer it, yet the violence, though not the bitterness, of my feelings had subsided. When able to converse with Mr. Rivers, I learned that Lady Selina Mellingcourt had made many attempts to see her daughter, and finding them unavail-

ing, had written the most artful letters, endeavouring to justify herself, and to win on her pity. Selina, finding that pecuniary aid was required, had requested the worthy Master in Chancery to apply a portion of her allowance to her mother, which he very unwillingly had consented to do, on the condition that Lady Selina was not again to seek admission, or to write to Miss Mellingcourt.

Mr. Rivers had seen Selina, and revealed to her, that circumstances, over which I had no control, had broken off for ever our contemplated union—that those circumstances could not for many years, if ever, be explained; and he had revealed to her, while my life was yet despaired of, that it was the grief occasioned to me by the discovery of this insurmountable obstacle, that had occasioned my illness.

"Oh! let his life be but spared!" exclaimed she. "Let me but have the bless-

ing of knowing that he lives, and I will not murmur at our separation on earth, trusting that we may hereafter be re-united in heaven!"

How my heart melted as I listened to Mr. Rivers, and how I prayed for the happiness of her, to whom henceforth I must be as dead.

A few days after my convalescence permitted me to be moved from my bed-room to the sitting-room, a letter was brought to me from the Duc de Valentinois, stating that he and his Duchesse had arrived in London, and were anxious to renew their acquaintance with me. I deputed Mr. Rivers to call on the Duc, and explain my present incapability of visiting him, as well as to offer him, as a stranger, any service in my power. When Mr. Rivers returned, he told me that he had not seen the Duchesse de Valentinois, who was confined by indisposition to her chamber, but that

the Duc had said he would call on me the following day.

"Almost the first question he asked," said Mr. Rivers, "was, how the young lady he had seen with us at the Jardin des Plantes was; and he expressed a hope that we would allow the Duchesse, as soon as she was able to leave her chamber, to become acquainted with her."

The following day the Duc paid me his offered visit, and after conversing with Mr. Rivers and me for some time, requested that we would give him our advice in a matter of great importance to him, and also recommend him a lawyer in whom he could place confidence.

"Mine is an eventful life," said the Duc; "and if I were not afraid of taking up too much of your time, or of fatiguing Mr. Meredith, who is still an invalid, I would relate it as briefly as I could; for in order to understand the affair which has

led me to visit England, and which involves not only the future happiness of my life but that of the Duchesse—which is infinitely more precious to me, it is necessary that I should make you acquainted with the subject of our anxiety."

We entreated him to believe that we should be gratified by his fulfilment of his wish; and he related to us the following narrative.

CHAPTER X.

"BORN of one of the most ancient and illustrious houses in Italy, I was the second son of the Duc de Valentinois, whose sole offspring consisted of my brother and myself. I pass over the days of my boyhood, marked only by the happiness peculiar to that age, when blessed with kind and indulgent parents, which ours were. When in my twentieth year, the daughter of my mother's sister, just then having lost her mother, and the father having died some years before, became an inmate of our house, being be-

queathed to the care of my mother. Never did nature form a more lovely creature than Francesca de Belmonte, then in her fifteenth year. With a form and face that——But why describe her? The young lady I saw with you at Paris is the living image of what my Francesca was. To behold was to love her; and soon did my heart yield up its every wish, its every hope, to her. My parents, unsuspicious of the passion with which she inspired me, were never tired of uttering commendations of Francesca, and thus fed the flame that was glowing in my breast. Never having had a daughter, the gentleness and winning sweetness of their niece delighted them; and they lavished on her every care and attention that it was in their power to bestow. My brother, too, loved Francesca; but oh! with what a different passion to mine! He felt towards her as a fond brother to a dear and only sister; for his heart had been dis-

posed of before he had seen her, to the beautiful Bianca Montéleone, to whom he was affianced.

"It was not until a suitor, in the person of the Prince di Casa Nuova, had demanded the hand of Francesca, that I became fully conscious of the extent and violence of my passion for her. You are doubtless aware, that in Italy proposals of marriage are often made when the parties have only a slight acquaintance; and the Prince di Caza Nuova had been but a short time presented to Francesca when he formally sought to be united to her. My father, finding him in every way an unexceptionable *parti*, and, moreover, taking into consideration that Francesca had no fortune, accepted them without hesitation, never doubting that his niece, like most other young ladies of the same rank and station in life, would be willing to ratify the engagement he had entered into. The tears of Francesca re-

vealed her disinclination to the marriage; but they were attributed to the shyness and maidenly reserve peculiar to one so young, and consequently were little heeded, or, if noticed, only led to my mother advising her not to decline so advantageous a marriage; while my father never admitted that she could commit such a folly. In vain did she entreat to be permitted to remain for ever under their protection, and declare that she could not be happy away from them. Her objections were treated as childish and absurd; and preparations were commenced as if she, the person most interested in the affair, had no voice in it. It was then, when seeing her beautiful eyes filled with tears, and her cheeks pale with grief, that I wrote and opened my whole soul to Francesca; for, though in the same house, I had little chance of obtaining a private interview with her, such is the system of reserve maintained in Italy between young people,

however near their relationship. I put the letter into her hand as she retired to her chamber at night, and passed the hours in a state of suspense and agitation not to be described. What if she loved me not—if her tears at the projected union originated not in preference for me? Oh! there was a torture in the thought! But as I dwelt on the recollection of the blushes that rose to her cheek when our eyes encountered, and the pleasure that sparkled in hers when I approached, I could not doubt but that my affection was shared.

"When Francesca entered our family, she was accompanied by the nurse of her mother, who had always been retained as a confidential servant in the establishment; and had never been a day absent from her young lady. The attachment of the faithful Giuditta to the orphan amounted almost to idolatry. She had no will but hers; and a smile or a tear from the Signorina would

have made her brave the displeasure of the whole world, so utterly engrossed was she by this concentrated and devoted affection. To her faithful breast did Francesca entrust the secret of our love, and although Giuditta devoutly crossed herself as she listened to the tale, and raised her eyes and hands at the notion of the dreadful sin of such near relatives loving each other, save as brother and sister, yet, when Francesca declared that she could not live if torn from me, and that her marriage with another would be her death-warrant, the simple-hearted old woman mingled her tears with those of her young lady, and no longer ventured to oppose her wishes.

"'But the church, Holy Mother—the church!' said Giuditta, after a pause. 'Without a dispensation from the Pope, never can you be the wife of your cousin; and how is that to be obtained? Think you that the Duca or Duchessa would ever apply

for it, or ever sanction a marriage which must thwart all their views for you both? They have ambitious projects for their son. Already have they determined on his wedding the rich heiress of the house of Fiorentino; a marriage to which few second sons could pretend. Old Jacopo, the intendant, told me so two months ago, and although the Signor Conte as yet knows nothing of it, the parents have arranged all.'

"'What! wed with that ugly and disagreeable girl!' exclaimed Francesca. 'They never can be so cruel as that, and never would my Enrico consent to such a sacrifice.'

"'Ay, my poor child, you little know how riches can blind the eyes of parents to those who possess them; and what can your cousin do?'

"'He can fly with me,' said Francesca, passionately, 'to some place where we can be united, and thus avoid marriages hateful to us both.'

"'But the dispensation—ah, Poverina! the dispensation!'

"'You will drive me mad, Giuditta, that you will!' said Francesca, bursting into a flood of tears, which so melted the good old woman that she consented to be the bearer of a letter to me, which her young lady hastily penned. Judge of my transport when I read that precious and *naïve* avowal of affection! and detected, in the indignation expressed by Francesca at the notion of my being the intended husband of the Princepessa Fiorentino, those symptoms of that jealousy which are ever inseparable from true love. I pressed the billet repeatedly to my lips, and could have kissed the brown and withered hand that presented it to me, so great was the joy I experienced.

"'How can you be so happy, Signor Conte?' said Giuditta, shaking her head, and looking reproachfully at me. 'See you not that this love will bring sorrow and

ruin on you both? Ah, woe is me! Never will your parents consent to your union; and the dispensation, Signor Conte, without their consent, will never be obtained.'

" 'We will fly to England, Giuditta. Francesca's uncle and mine dwells there. He will receive us as his children, and there will we be wedded.'

" 'Blessed Madonna!' and Giuditta crossed herself. " Surely you would not take my young lady to a land of heretics? O, Signor Conte, no good can come of all this. Your uncle only went to England to avoid a prison—perhaps death, for having displeased the king; but you, too, my precious child, to go among heretics! Do not, I implore you, think of it.'

" Every day did Francesca and I exchange letters through the medium of the faithful Giuditta, who, while counselling and imploring us not to be disobedient to my parents, and,

above all, not to go to the land of heretics, as she called England, enabled us, though against her will, to keep up our secret correspondence, and at length, to carry our wishes into effect.

CHAPTER X.

"THE preparations for Francesca's marriage with the Prince di Casa Nuova were now nearly completed, and we determined to fly. The nurse consented to accompany us, saying that she dared not trust her poor child among heretics, without being with her to guard her against their machinations. I had husbanded my pecuniary resources, and sold my two horses; and Francesca had, through the assistance of Giuditta, disposed of some of her trinkets, so that we possessed a sum adequate to defray our voyage to England; and

once there, we counted on our uncle for the rest, until a reconciliation, through his mediation, could be accomplished with my parents. I discovered that an English merchant ship was on the eve of sailing from Naples, and secured passages in it for three; silencing the scruples of the Captain by making him believe that I was a political victim, flying from a tyrannical government, to which I had rendered myself offensive by my love of freedom, and admiration for England and its laws. Francesca was to pass as my wife, Giuditta as her grandmother, and our rank in life was to be represented as not above that of the middle class—an assertion which the limited state of our finances, and the mediocrity of the accommodation agreed for, might well bear out.

"The day previous to that fixed on for our departure, my brother, having by chance discovered that I had sold my horses, asked me the cause. To prevent suspicion, I was

compelled to utter a falsehood, and told him that having some debts, I had parted with my horses to pay them. 'Why not have recourse to my purse, *caro fratello?*' said he; 'you ought to know that all I possess is at your disposal. Here is enough to buy two new horses, and to defray the expense of your *menu plaisirs* for six months to come;' and he placed in my hand a sum larger than I had ever previously possessed. I longed to confess all to him, for his brotherly kindness melted me; but the reflection that were I so to do, he might incur blame from my parents for not having informed them of my rash intention, prevented me; therefore I only wrung his hand and thanked him.

"The next night, when all were buried in sleep, we stole from the house of my father, and found a boat waiting at the mole, which soon bore us to the merchantman. We were all three greatly agitated, and the meanness

of the accommodation prepared for us greatly shocked Giuditta.

" ' Holy Mother!" exclaimed she, ' who would have thought that my young lady, or you, Signor Conte, the descendant of princes, would ever be condemned to enter such a place as this. Oh! what a terrible odour, why the very cords that fasten the sails are infected with it!'

" We were obliged to beseech the good old woman to be silent, lest she should by her murmurs betray that we were not what we had represented ourselves to the Captain to be; and soon finding that Francesca bore the privations of her narrow prison so well, Giuditta became ashamed to complain. The vessel set sail in a few minutes after we embarked, and we seated ourselves on the deck, to gaze, with tear-dimmed eyes, on the fast receding shores of our beautiful Naples.

"I had left a letter for my brother, breathing an affectionate farewell, and entreating his

good offices with our father and mother, to mitigate their anger at the step we had taken. I did not disclose the place we were going to, but promised to inform him of it as soon as the church had joined us. I pleaded love—all-powerful love, as the excuse for Francesca and myself; and prayed for the pardon of our parents for this our first fault. I took the precaution, by dropping the letter in the post, that it should only reach its destination after we should have left the shores of Naples. When we could behold that fair city no more, I prevailed on Francesca, and her faithful nurse, who never moved from her side, to retire to their narrow and hard berths, and seek the repose of which they stood so much in need. With what feelings of joy and rapture did I welcome the next morning, conscious that Francesca was now free from the hateful marriage to which, had she remained, she would have been compelled! And when,

attended by Giuditta, she joined me on deck, attired in the plain and simple dress purchased for the voyage, I remarked with pleasure the profound admiration her beauty excited, and I felt as vain of it as if kings and princes, instead of humble English sailors, had accorded it. Nothing could exceed the attention and good nature of the Captain, and, indeed, of the whole crew. Even Giuditta was forced to admit that, for heretics, they were astonishingly good, and though she crossed herself more frequently than ever, and sometimes murmured at the unpalatable fare set before us, she was, on the whole, more reasonable than could have been expected for one so prejudiced and superstitious.

The weather continued fair during the whole passage. The days, and a great portion of the nights, were passed on deck, where the Captain had arranged some mat-

tresses, with an awning of sail-cloth, for our accommodation. How blissful was it to float over the calm and unruffled sea, blue as the sky it reflected, and seated by the object dearest to me on earth, whose dulcet accents, uttering words of love, sounded sweeter than music to my ear! What a picture did she present, as, half-reclining on the shoulder of Giuditta, her beautiful and youthful face, contrasted by the brown and wrinkled one of the aged woman, she would listen as I read the divine Commedia of Dante, now melting into pity over the loves of Francesca de Rimini and Paolo, or shuddering at the terrible fate of Ugolino. That poor ship, with all its discomforts and unsavoury odours, was rendered a happy place to me, by the presence of my adored Francesca, and by the unchanging sweetness of temper with which she bore the inevitable hardships to which we were exposed. Having

formerly been taught English, we now devoted two or three hours a-day to the study of that language, in which the Captain was of great use to us; and though Giuditta would turn up her eyes and hands when she heard her lady speak English, and would pronounce it to be a barbarous language, I thought it sounded sweetly when uttered by Francesca. By the time we reached Portsmouth, we were able to make ourselves intelligible in it, and to understand much of what was said.

"At length we landed on *terra firma*, and having remained a day to refresh ourselves at Portsmouth, we set out for London, with a letter of recommendation from the Captain to a quiet hotel, where he said we might remain, at a moderate expense, until we had suited ourselves with lodgings. Having established ourselves in it, Francesca, smiling at the smallness of the rooms and the plain-

ness of the furniture, both of which Giuditta declared were abominable, and only fit for those heretics the English, I despatched a letter to our uncle, entreating him to come to us as soon as possible. Although we both fully expected to be severely reproved by him for the step we had taken, we nevertheless longed impatiently to embrace him; for the sense of loneliness experienced in a vast and crowded city, where we knew not a single person beside him, rendered us somewhat *triste*. Imagine, then, our disappointment, when the messenger who took my letter brought it back, with the intelligence that the *marchese* had quitted London for Paris, a week before, and was not expected to return. Francesca's spirits drooped, for the first time since we left home, at this news; and Giuditta declared that it was a judgment on us for our sin, in flying in the face of my parents. I soon soothed my be-

loved into her usual sweet and winning cheerfulness, and the next morning, accompanied by the master of the hotel, who offered to conduct me, I went to the Neapolitan embassy, to demand counsel and assistance for immediately having the nuptial ceremony performed.

CHAPTER XI.

"The Minister had been absent from Naples some years, having filled a mission at Vienna previously; consequently there was little risk of his recognising me, and I determined to sink my title, lest, being known, he might oppose some scruple to forwarding my marriage. In the whole embassy there was not a single person to whom Francesca or I were known, and this gave me courage as I entered its portals. The Secretary whom I saw inquired, if the young Signora or I had no parents to act for us on

this occasion, and looked somewhat suspicious when I told him that we had only a grandmother of the lady's. He was disposed to postpone the marriage for some days, but at length yielded to my entreaties, and named the day after the following one for its celebration. During our brief interview, he examined me with evident curiosity, but I affected such a rustic bearing and manner, that his suspicions, if he really entertained any, subsided, and I left the embassy reassured.

"I found Francesca blooming and gay, and highly pleased with a bouquet of flowers which I had brought her. They were the first we had seen since we had left the Palazzo Valentinois; and although far less odorous than our Neapolitan ones, were nevertheless welcome. Giuditta glanced contemptuously at them, and said, 'What poor, chilly-looking things! They seem as if stinted in their growth, and as if the sun had never shone

on them. Oh! Signora, what a cheerless land this is! No wonder its inhabitants are heretics, for there is no sunshine to warm them into devotion, and no images of the blessed Madonna or saints to remind them of heaven. Even the moon here, as I observed last night, is wholly different from our bright and silvery moon at Naples. Here it seems ashamed to shew its face, and looks like lead instead of silver. *Anima mia!*' and she burst into tears as she embraced Francesca, 'when shall we return to our own land? We shall pine and die here without the sun, and without even an image of the Madonna to kiss before we draw our last breath.'

"How I counted the hours, until that arrived which was to bless me with the hand of Francesca! We entered a large, rumbling, and not over-clean coach, which drew forth many comparisons and animadversions on the part of Giuditta.

" ' What a country!' exclaimed she, elevating her nether lip and chin contemptuously. ' Not a bit of gilding to be seen; not a morsel of macaroni to be had that is eatable; not a drop of wine, except that fiery stuff that burns the throat. *Oh! Madonna mia!* Let me but once more find myself in sunny *Napoli*, and never more will I leave its happy shore!'

" We had to warn Giuditta repeatedly not to betray that she was not the grandmother of the bride.

" ' Such an invention may pass with the foolish heretics,' said she, ' but think you our countrymen can be imposed upon? As well may you pretend that kites breed doves, as that I should be the grandmother of the Signora; but I will not deny it, although I shall despise our countrymen if they believe it.'

" I dreaded, up to the last moment, that some obstacle to our union would arise.

The noble air of Francesca, which her humble attire could not conceal, made me tremble lest it should create a doubt of our station in life; but her timidity and bashfulness on the occasion assisted more than her disguise in imposing on our countrymen. Our names drew attention, and the Secretaries looked at us more narrowly; but we appeared, although we did not feel, unembarrassed. The ceremony was performed at the Embassy; and an Italian priest, in our own beautiful language, pronounced the nuptial benediction,—much to the satisfaction of Giuditta, who declared that she could not consider us as really wedded were the rites uttered in any other.

"We returned to our hotel, after taking especial care to be furnished with certificates of our marriage. That was a blissful day, although passed in a dark and dingy chamber, destitute not only of all the splendour to which from infancy we had both

been habituated, but even of the elegancies and comforts to which foreigners in a much more humble station than ours are accustomed. We felt not their absence. All in all to each other, we only were alive to the joy of being indissolubly united, and the happy consciousness that henceforth no one could divide us. Even on Giuditta, some portion of our happiness was reflected; although she more than once reproached us that we could be so happy in such a sunless land, and in such a wretched abode. But now that, in the sight of God and man, we were husband and wife, the one great point of her anxiety having been removed, she was less fretful.

"I pass over the first blissful days of our union; for what description could paint our happiness? Our thoughts and feelings wholly concentrated in each other, the absence of all interruption from friends or acquaintances we considered an additional

blessing. When able to think of sublunary affairs,—for during a week we had lived in a bright world created by our passionate love, —we wrote a joint letter to our parents, apprising them of our marriage, and imploring their blessing on it, and pardon for the means we had adopted to carry it into effect. This letter I put into the post myself, and anxiously did we calculate the days it would take to arrive, and those which must elapse before we could receive the wished for answer. Knowing the affection of our parents, we entertained but little doubt of their forgiveness, now that the step we had taken was irrevocable; consequently, until a week after the time at which a letter from them could have arrived, our happiness was unbroken by any care for the future.

" In the full confidence of being speedily recalled to Naples, we had not thought of leaving the hotel in which we had at first

taken up our abode, for private lodgings. The discomfort and confined scale of the house, so wholly different to all that we had been hitherto accustomed, had led us to form a conclusion that the expenses would be in proportion to the mediocrity of the accommodation; and, unskilled in such affairs, we had omitted to ask for our bill. My ignorance also led me to command only such food and wine as we were habituated to in our own country. But our supplies were so moderate, as frequently to draw from Giuditta the remark, that any of the servants in my father's palace would be very much dissatisfied with the quantity and quality of the ill-cooked viands served at our table; and the sour wines resembling in nothing but the names the product of Italy. Consequently I started in dismay, when the account of seven weeks (uncalled for) was laid on my table, with a pressing request for immediate payment.

This circumstance ten days before would have caused me but comparatively little uneasiness; for, aware of the wealth of our parents, and undoubting their liberality, I counted on receiving funds sufficient to defray every expense in England, and to provide for our return home in a style befitting our station. But now, when ten days over the time calculated for the arrival of their letter had elapsed without any tidings from them, I remembered with terror that the whole of the funds in our possession would be barely sufficient to pay the long and extravagant bill before me, leaving us penniless in a strange land.

CHAPTER XII.

"How painful, how humiliating, is the first rude pressure of pecuniary embarrassment! I felt its grasp crushing my energies and chilling my life's blood, as I recollected that I was far, far away from my home and those who could succour me; and that in the vast and densely crowded city, of which I was now an inhabitant, I possessed not a single friend or acquaintance to whom I could apply for even a temporary assistance. Eight short and fleeting weeks before, I had rejoiced in the freedom from in-

terruption to our bridal days, originating in our not having an acquaintance in London; and now, gladly would I have hailed the presence of one,—ay, or of many,—to inspire me with confidence, that, in an extremity like that which I trembled in the anticipation of, I could count on some friend to reach out a hand to save the object dearer to me than life, from the stings of poverty.

" I paid the bill, and ventured some expostulations on the exorbitance of the charges it contained, when the master of the hotel, with an unblushing face, assured me that nothing could be more moderate; adding, that the foreign dishes and wines which I commanded, were, in consequence of freight and heavy duties, so expensive, that even at the prices he had charged he should be a very heavy loser by having furnished them. To reason with him I saw would be perfectly useless; for as well might one

attempt to snatch from a hungry lion its prey, as to induce this rapacious man to abate one of the extortionate charges he had made. What was to be done? To remain where we were, was to expose ourselves to fresh imposition; yet to seek a lodging now that our money was all gone, was not to be thought of. Having paid so large a sum to the master of the hotel would insure us a credit for some weeks more; and *hope*, all that was now left, whispered—though, alas! but in a feeble voice—that in three weeks, succour from Naples would, nay must, arrive. Our parents, my brother, too, could not, however great their displeasure might be, leave us to suffer all the ignominous outrages to which poverty exposes its victims. No, they would relent; and we should soon receive funds to meet our wants. Nevertheless, I experienced a sense of degradation as, while conscious that my purse was empty, I continued to incur

expenses, which, though limited almost to parsimony, were inevitable, being only for the strict necessaries of life. I never saw my landlord without trembling lest he should present his bill; and as our orders for our repasts became more economical, his civility decreased in a proportionate ratio. I was afraid to complain of the badness of the fare served to us, or the extreme negligence of the attendants, lest it might lead to his urging us for payment, or requesting us to leave his apartments free for those whose expenditure might allow a wider field for the extortion he loved to practice. Oh! the horror and deep loathing to a generous spirit and upright mind, to find oneself in the power of some sordid and ignoble being, and of trembling lest those most loved, most honoured, should be made to feel the effects of such a state of thraldom!

"Francesca bore the privations to which my sense of probity and prudence induced

me, though most unwillingly, to expose her, without a single murmur; although I had not, I could not, have brought myself to explain to her that they were the consequences of hard necessity. To Giuditta I was less reserved, and it was necessary that I should be; for she, attributing the scantiness and inferior quality of our repasts to the wilful imposition of our landlord, of whom she entertained the worst opinion, was so desirous to reproach him, and to insist on our having what she called our rights for our money, that nothing short of her being made acquainted with my exact position could restrain her from an angry contest with him.

"When she had heard my statement, she groaned aloud, and exclaimed, '*Oh! Madonna mia!* and is it come to this? Are the descendants of the purest and best blood in Italy to owe to a base-born rogue and heretic the bread to sustain life? This

comes of disobedience and the terrible sin of cousins marrying without a dispensation from the Pope. Woe is me! I always thought some terrible evil would befal us, and now it has arrived. And the Contessina, she that has been nurtured with such care,—the most dainty *beccafichi* and most delicate chickens furnishing her dinner,—to be now condemned to partake of stale macaroni dressed with bad milk or rancid broth, washed down with sour stuff, falsely called wine, mixed with uniced water, that not one of our poor *lazaroni* at Naples would condescend to moisten his lip with!'

"How did the words of the poor old woman wound me! Their truth I could not deny; and although I had often and often made the same reflections that she had just uttered, they never struck me so forcibly as when coming from her lips. It was no wonder that my adored Francesca was changed; and I shuddered as I recol-

lected how frequently of late I had noticed the languor of her eyes, and the paleness of her cheek. Yes, it was plain the badness of the food, joined to the ungenial climate, were undermining her constitution, and I, I, was the cause of all this; for I had brought her from affluence and Italy to starvation and murky England! And was our dream of love thus to end? Was the gaunt monster, Want, to crush hearts glowing with such fondness as ours, and to waste frames still unscathed by Time, ere yet the torch of Hymen burned one shade less brilliantly than on the happy day that our hands were joined?

"While these sad reflections were passing through my mind, Giuditta, who had left the chamber, returned. She approached me, after having carefully closed the door, and drawing forth a purse, said, 'Here, Signor, here is the fruit of many years labour. Take it, I beseech you; nay, (seeing that I put it

aside,) you must not refuse me. I had always intended to bequeath it to my young mistress at my death; then why not accept it for her use now? Pay the bad man of this house, and let us retire to a lodging where you will be less cheated, and cannot be more uncomfortable than here. I can cook many little dainties that the Contessina likes. I offered the extortionate host here to do so often and often, when I saw the wretched attempts made in his kitchen to dress some of our Neapolitan dishes. But he would not consent to it, and had the impudence to laugh in my face when I told him that at Naples we never dressed macaroni with blue milk, tainted butter, and cheese that one could smell at half a mile distance. He is an impudent fellow; and wanted me to tell him what fortune you had. Yes, your poor Giuditta can turn her hand to many things, and we shall all be the happier for leaving the house of this base

fellow, who, wicked sinner as he is, mocked me when he saw me kiss this image of my blessed Madonna!'—and she drew it from her breast, and pressed it devoutly to her lips. 'Yes, I repeat it, Signor Conte, we shall be safer when we are out of the house of this heretic.'

"I took the purse from Giuditta, and found its contents to be more than I had anticipated. This, thought I, will keep the wolf from the door much longer than I had dared to anticipate, and I will adopt the advice of its simple but worthy lender.

"I was entering the little *salon* where I had left Francesca, when I encountered at its door the master of the hotel, with a stern aspect, and a long roll of paper in his hand, so exactly resembling the one he had presented to me eight weeks before, that I instantly guessed what it was.

"'I hope, sir,' said he, 'that you will not find it inconvenient to pay me the

amount of my bill to-day. I have allowed it to run on for eight weeks—a very unusual thing, sir, with hotel-keepers, who always expect to be paid every week, or at least every month. But thinking it might be an accommodation to you, sir, I have not hitherto pressed for the money, but being this day compelled to make up a large sum to meet a bill that falls due, I must request immediate payment. And I must also beg, sir, that you will seek apartments elsewhere; for I have let them to a gentleman and lady of fortune, who require immediate possession of them.'

"I made no reply, for the insolence of the tone and manner of this base man so much irritated me that I did not dare to trust myself to express my sense of them, lest I should be provoked beyond my powers of forbearance, and so lead to a scene that must distress my poor Francesca. I looked at the total amount of the last

page, and noticed with surprise and disgust that the diminution in our repasts during the last eight weeks, submitted to from motives of economy, had not led to the least decrease in his charges. The amount was the same as that of the former bill. Knowing it was unavailing to remonstrate, I asked him to accompany me to a banker's, where I changed the Italian gold of Giuditta for English coin, — much to the dissatisfaction of mine host, who had on the former payment grossly imposed on my ignorance of the rate of exchange between the two countries, and profited considerably at my expense. When he received the full amount of his bill, his tone altered considerably. He told me, that if at all inconvenient to me, there was no necessity for our leaving his house. Nay, he went so far as to say, that he would give us the preference over the gentleman and lady of fortune, whom he had asserted had taken the

rooms we occupied, or indeed over any other person; a statement I could easily believe, as no others would be satisfied to pay one half so much for the wretched rooms and fare provided for us as we had done. But I coldly declined his offers, and immediately went in search of lodgings. Many were those which I entered before I could discover any to suit me. Those that pleased me were beyond the reach of my finances; and those that accorded with my means were so confined and dingy, that I turned from them with a disgust I found it difficult to conceal. But what struck me with surprise was, that each of the owners of these wretched abodes proclaimed her own to be all that could be desired in a residence, and was disposed to treat me with incivility when I declined engaging her rooms. I often heard the phrase of, 'Trumpery foreigner!' and 'Beggarly Frenchman!' muttered as I retreated, and the doors were

slammed after me with a violence that denoted the angry feelings I had excited. At length I left the confined streets through which I had wandered, and sought a more airy situation, in an outlet at the end of Oxford-street, one of the great lungs of the west end of the town, through which a little pure air is inhaled. Bayswater is the name of the place to which I refer. It runs parallel with the north side of Hyde Park, of which the houses command an extensive view. I saw bills in the windows of several of the houses, and having selected that which looked the cleanest, I knocked, and was admitted by the owner, a young woman attired in a widow's dress. The apartments, though small and poorly furnished, were clean; and the woman, unlike the others, abstained from uttering any commendations of her house. What she did say, however, impressed me highly in its favour; for it consisted of one self-evident

fact, that the house was very airy and quiet, she being the only inmate. I at once engaged the rooms, and when asked for a reference,—an awkward request to a person who had not a single friend or acquaintance in England,—I answered, that being a stranger, I proposed paying a month's rent in advance, a proposition that was perfectly satisfactory to the widow, and I returned to the hotel to prepare for moving into our new abode. Francesca was pleased with my arrangement, and Giuditta delighted to leave our heretic landlord. I conveyed them in a coach to Bayswater, and installed them in our humble but clean abode; where, with the assistance of the mistress of it, Giuditta prepared a light repast, of which we partook with more cheerfulness than had marked our late ones at the hotel.

CHAPTER XIII.

"On rising next morning, Francesca called me to admire the fine prospect from our window. Immured as she had been for nearly four months in our dark and gloomy chambers in the hotel, the sight of green trees and grass was welcome to her, and she was as delighted as a child at looking forth on them. Soon after breakfast, much more comfortably served by our good Giuditta than we had lately been, Francesca, turning pale as marble, uttered a faint ejaculation, and swooned away. For a few minutes I believed her to be dead, and my frantic

agony was indescribable, but when a heavy sigh heaved her breast, and a pale tinge of red coloured her cheeks, my joy was as wild as my despair had previously been. Never shall I forget the first glance she turned on me, as her eyes opened, or the smile which played over her beautiful lips, as she hid her face in my bosom. 'Enrico, bless your Francesca,' whispered she, 'for she has now the hope that she will soon render you a father! I have long believed that this would be,' continued she, 'for I have of late been ill, very ill, but now no doubt remains, and O, my Enrico, think of the blessing of having a dear infant to love and cherish!" That day was one of happiness. Yes, even in a mean lodging, and exiles in a foreign land, without the means of supporting existence for more than a few weeks, and without a friend or acquaintance in England, we enjoyed, such is the power of affection, a happiness in the thought of having a

little being to perpetuate our love, often denied to those on whom wealth and splendour have poured all their treasures. Giuditta, too, partook the happiness we enjoyed, and was never tired of talking of the coming stranger, and though she sometimes referred to the misfortune, as she called it, of its being born in a land of heretics, and of our not being able to make those preparations for its arrival, which, had we been at Naples, would not be stinted, she nevertheless looked on the coming event as a very desirable one, and redoubled her care and attention to Francesca. At an early hour in the morning, Giuditta, accompanied by our landlady, would go to market for the wants of the day, and such was her economy and skill in arranging our repasts, that we soon found, that with one-half the sum we had expended at the wretched hotel, enduring all the privations its rapacious host imposed on us, we might have lived in our

present lodgings for a year, with infinitely more comfort.

"Day after day, and week after week. passed away, and still no letter from Naples reached us. Had our parents, then, wholly renounced us? And my brother, too, that good, kind brother, surely he would not abandon us; but yet, how account for his silence? The spring passed away, and summer had now made its presence felt, less by the genial heat peculiar to that season, at least in other climates, than by the dusty trees, and parched grass, on which it was no longer a pleasure to look, and still we remained without tidings from our family. Oh! the heart-sickening misery of hope deferred!—of awaking in the morning with a sentiment too weak, it is true, to be called expectation, yet, without which, under the pressure of impending evil, despair must ensue; and of seeing night close in, bringing with it only disappointment, the bitterness

of which proved that we had still been cheated by hope.

"And now, notwithstanding we had exercised the utmost economy, the fund provided by the poor Giuditta drew to a close. How did my heart shrink as I watched its diminution! Never did miser so eye his gold as I did when coin after coin vanished, and when I saw the lovely face of my Francesca become daily more pale and attenuated. The dread of her requiring those delicacies and that medical aid I no longer possessed the means of providing for her, tortured my feelings almost beyond my power of endurance. And this fair creature, about to become a mother, without any of the comforts—nay, more, without many of the necessaries requisite for a delicate woman in her position, might now have been surrounded with all that wealth could bestow, and splendour furnish, had I not madly, selfishly encouraged her affection for me, and fled with her

to a foreign land, far away from the friends who would have cherished her. When brilliant equipages, filled with gaily-dressed ladies, were whirled through the Park, enjoying the fresh air, for which Francesca, now unable to walk, languished, I would turn from them with angry emotions, uttering imprecations on my own head for having entailed poverty, with all its harassing privations, on her. Nurtured in luxury, and never having a wish ungratified, her angelic patience under our misfortunes only served to render me more wretched on her account. When passing through the Park, I encountered nurses, bearing in their arms beautiful children, whose fair and dimpled faces peeped forth from the delicate lace borders that half shrouded them, and whose snowy, embroidered robes, and rich cloaks, denoted the wealth, no less than the taste, of their fond mothers, my heart used to ache as I reflected how stinted and ordinary were the habili-

ments provided for our coming babe, who was to open its eyes in a scene of poverty, wherein its father trembled at the approach of even still greater want than any already sustained—of positive starvation! Giuditta and I had carefully concealed the extent of my poverty from my wife, and when, day by day, we diminished some portion of our already scanty fare, we led her to believe that prudence, and not necessity, instigated the measure, as I wished to husband my resources until we could hear from home. Her inexperience in all pecuniary matters, rendered her credulous on this point, and she submitted to the privations imposed on her without a murmur. And now I had parted with my last piece of gold, and only a few shillings remained of it. Francesca possessed some few trinkets; but these were of trifling value, those which had descended to her from her mother being left in the custody of mine, until she was to marry. To dis-

pose of these ornaments, would be to let her into the secret of our extreme poverty, hitherto so well guarded, so that was a measure not to be thought of. To sell my gold repeater was the next project that occurred to me, but then came the reflection, that Francesca, from having no *pendule* in her room, frequently inquired the hour, and would consequently soon remark the absence of the watch. While I was deliberating by what means money could be raised, Giuditta beckoned to me, and when we had reached the small chamber appropriated to her use, of which, to prevent interruption, she carefully locked the door; she drew from her pocket five guineas, and placed them in my hand.

" ' Take them, Signor Conte,' said she, observing that I hesitated; ' take them.'

" ' How—where have you obtained them, Giuditta?'

" ' Is it not enough, Signor Conte, that

they will keep the wolf from the door for some days, without your troubling yourself any further about them?'

"'No, Giuditta, I insist on knowing. You have not, surely, revealed our poverty at the Neapolitan embassy?'

"'*Madonna mia!* how could you suspect me of doing such a thing? No, Signor Conte, Giuditta would not ask charity for herself, humble as she is; judge, then, if she could demean her noble master and mistress, by soliciting it for them. If you must know, then, how I acquired this gold, and I hoped you would not inquire, I sold for it my earrings, chain, cross, and medallion, with the effigy of the Santissima Madre.'

"'What! those gifts of my deceased mother-in-law, so much prized by you! That cross and medallion with which you offered up your prayers?'

"'Si, Signor Conte, and though it cost me a pang to leave them in the hands of a

heretic, Heaven pardon me if I have, by so doing, committed a sin; right glad was I to be able to procure a little money against the hour of trial of the Signora Contessa, who, as well as the *bambino*, will stand in need of many little things.'

"'And did your heavy ornaments produce no more than this paltry sum, my good Giuditta?' demanded I, being well aware that they were worth at least six times that amount.

"'*Tutti, tutti*, Signor Conte,' replied the worthy nurse, 'and would you believe it, the hard-hearted man made a favour of giving me so much. He declared Italian gold was much less pure than English—the *birbone*, as if anything in this sunless land could be as good as in our bright one. But what vexed me more than all, he scoffed at our Neapolitan workmanship, and tossed the sacred cross and the effigy of Nostra Santissima Madonna into his unclean scales,

with no more reverence than if they were mere common coin. But let us not think of these vexatious things, Signor Conte, we have the gold, and small as the sum is, it will enable us to make a little better preparation for *nostro carissimo bambino* and *la cara Contessa*.'

" Deeply touched by the devoted attachment of this faithful creature, I attempted to express my sense of it, but she instantly interrupted me, and endeavoured to make light of the service she had rendered. ' And poor Giuditta,' thought I, ' could part from her ornaments, and the symbols of her religion too, so dear and sacred in her eyes, while I have hesitated to dispose of objects of little use. I will instantly go and sell a diamond pin and an emerald ring.' Both these gifts of my mother were of considerable value, so I calculated on receiving a sum for them that might enable me to increase the comforts of my dear Francesca, in her

approaching trial, which was now daily expected. I walked out, and looked into several jewellers' shops, before I could summon resolution enough to enter any of them. Hitherto, I had never sought such shops, except to buy, when glittering jewels were exposed to tempt me, and the sellers exhibited that respectful deference to the high-born, peculiar to all of their trade in every country. Now I was conscious of entering a jeweller's, under altered circumstances, and for a different purpose, and this consciousness gave to my manner an embarrassment and shyness I could not shake off. The shopkeeper, I suppose, observed this, for as I entered, he eyed me narrowly, and my foreign accent and broken English only seemed to increase his suspicious scrutiny of me. For a few minutes I had not courage to make known the real purpose of my visit, but affected to examine some trifling articles. At length, I drew forth the ring,

and asked the jeweller if he was disposed to purchase it.

" ' I must first be sure it is a real stone,' said he, ' for you foreigners make such good imitations, that one must be careful before buying from you.'

" I felt my blood boil at this insinuation, and all the *fierté* of the Valentinois was aroused in me. Nevertheless, I controlled all demonstrations of it, and merely replied, ' The emerald is a genuine and a fine one.'

" ' Yes, I now see it is real,' answered the jeweller; ' but the stone is by no means a remarkable one. The green is not so bright as it should be, and towards the edge of the stone it is less deep in colour. There is also a flaw in it.'

" ' Where?' demanded I, certain that his assertion was incorrect.

" ' Towards the left side.'

" I took the magnifying glass through which he had examined it, but even with

its aid I could discover no flaw, which I told him.

"'Your eye is perhaps not so exercised as mine,' observed he, coolly; 'but buyers are always quicker at discovering flaws than are sellers.'

"'I maintain that the emerald has no flaw,' said I, somewhat haughtily. 'What are you disposed to give for it?'

"'Why, not much,' answered he. 'If it had been a diamond, a ruby, or a sapphire, I could have made you a good offer; but emeralds are out of fashion, there is no demand for them, so I can't bid you more than fifteen pounds.'

"'Fifteen pounds!' repeated I. 'Surely you must have made a mistake. The stone is worth at least eighty guineas!'

"'So the man who sold it to you, may have asserted,' observed he, 'because, seeing you are a young man, he thought you knew no better, but I would not give fifteen

pounds ten shillings for it, I can tell you, so if you are not disposed to take my offer, there is an end of it.'

"I walked out of the shop, angrily, and entered another, determined this time to inquire the value of the ring, before I again offered it for sale, imagining that there might be some unaccountable difference in the price of emeralds in England and Naples. Having entered the next jeweller's, I drew forth my ring, and asked the man its worth.

"'Do you want to sell it?' demanded he, while examining it.

"'No,' replied I.

"'It is a fine stone,' said he, 'and worth about seventy-five or eighty pounds, but you will not get near that sum for it, I can tell you.'

"It would be endless to recount the numerous shops at which I tried to sell my emerald, and the affronts to which I was exposed from each of the persons to whom

I offered it for sale. All decried it, discovering flaws where none existed, and some insinuated their suspicions of its not having been honestly come by, my being a foreigner evidently furnishing them with ground for believing that it might be stolen. How hard did I find it to submit to such insults! and how did I now learn to feel for the poverty which lays the unfortunate open to them.

CHAPTER XIV.

"PREVIOUS to leaving my country, I had seen only the bright side of life. Every object I beheld was decked in the prismatic hues with which youth, fortune, and station, invested them; but now, each assumed the sombre cast which the stern monitor, poverty, throws over all it touches. And, perhaps, the most difficult to be borne of all the bitter trials to which it condemns its victims, is the contumely of that class to the respect of which they had hitherto been accustomed.

"The sale of the emerald ring and diamond pin, though parted with for a quarter of their value, enabled me to provide many comforts for my poor Francesca; and when she gave birth to a female infant, our humble lodging had assumed an air of neatness if not of elegance, and everything necessary for her and the dear baby was ready. The joy of the young mother when she beheld her child is not to be described. Every trial, every care, was forgotten; and as she pressed it to her heart, bending her beautiful face over its tiny one, I was reminded of a half-blown rose reclining over one of the delicate buds on the same stem. Never shall I forget her look of love and delight as she held her babe up to me, and appealed to my judgment whether so beautiful a child had ever been seen? Nay, so proud was she of the little creature, that she was disposed to resent the assertion of the good old Giuditta, that it exactly re-

sembled its mother at the same age, Francesca maintaining that *she* never could have been half so lovely as her child. The infant was a small and delicate one, requiring more than usual care. Its mother attempted to nurse it herself, but after some days it became evident that her own health was not equal to the effort, as well as that the child suffered from the delicacy of its nurse. A substitute was therefore to be sought, and was soon found; but all the trials to which my poor Francesca had hitherto been exposed were light in comparison to that which awaited her, when she beheld her infant for the first time drawing its sustenance from a strange source. It required all my reasoning to reconcile her to the renunciation of this the sweetest of her maternal duties; and it was only the conviction that the well-being of the child depended on it, that induced her to acquiesce. 'Ah! Signor Conte,' would Giuditta exclaim,

as she looked on the infant greedily imbibing the milk of its nurse, 'what a painful sight it is to see our *bambina* indebted to a heretic for its sustenance. *Madre mia!* it is to be hoped that with the milk, *nostra carissima* will not imbibe the heresy of her nurse.' From the first, my wife disliked the woman engaged to nurse our child; but this I attributed to the natural jealousy she felt towards the person who had taken her place. Giuditta, too, entertained a strong antipathy against the nurse, but as, with the ignorance and prejudice peculiar to her class and country, she disliked all who professed not the same religion as herself, I refused to adopt her hatred, and often tried to vindicate the object of it. The nurse, having discovered that she was no favourite either with the mistress or Giuditta, often evinced symptoms of ill-temper and waywardness that increased the dislike of her lady, and drew down on her the anger of

Giuditta, who made her sensible of her displeasure by animated gestures, expressive of the anger which her ignorance of the English language precluded her from otherwise demonstrating. The nurse was in the habit, on fine days,—and they, Heaven knows! in England, are but few and far between,—of taking out the child into the Park to enjoy the air. On such occasions my wife would charge her to walk only in that part of it which fronted our dwelling, and would sit in the window with her eyes rivetted on the baby all the time the nurse paraded her up and down. Giuditta observed that the nurse was greatly displeased at what she considered a want of confidence in her, and at my request Francesca became less watchful. The truth is, I feared that, by giving any pretext for ill-humour to the nurse, our child might suffer in its health; the physician who had recommended her having told me such was often the case

with nurses. One day our treasure was, as usual, carried forth into the Park. When the time at which she was in the habit of being brought home arrived, my wife became uneasy. She looked from her window, but in vain—no nurse was to be seen; and I, observing her alarm, seized my hat and went in search of her. I flew rather than ran in the direction in which we had last seen the nurse and child. I inquired of every individual I met, whether he or she had encountered them, and was assured that so many nurses and children answering the description I had given had been met, that it would be impossible to decide which was the precise one of which I was in search. I felt that I dared not return home, or present myself before Francesca without tidings of her child, so, half distracted, I continued to run in the direction which I imagined the nurse might have taken, until nearly overpowered with fatigue,

when I saw a man rush across my path, pursued by a crowd, who uttered cries the sense of which I did not understand; and this individual having for a minute or two ran by my side, soon left me, exhausted and panting, far behind, scarcely able to move along. The pursuing crowd now came up with me; some of them rudely seized me by the arms, and while they held me, assailed me with every epithet that could most insult; among which, 'Pickpocket' and 'Thief' were the most often repeated. 'Throw him into the Serpentine!' cried one; 'He is an old offender!' exclaimed another; 'I have had my eye a long time on him!' said a third; and 'I have noticed him prowling about day after day, looking into gentlemen's pockets!' asserted a fourth. I now began to comprehend my position. It was clear that I was mistaken for the man whom I had seen running away, and who had perpetrated the theft of which

I stood accused. I attempted to explain this; but the moment my foreign accent had revealed that I was a stranger, hisses and groans assailed me. 'Beggarly Frenchman!' 'Rascally pickpocket!' were the words echoed around, and three or four of the police, who now arrived, had some difficulty in rescuing me from the hands of the violent men who had seized me, and of preventing them from taking summary justice on the imagined thief. I was marched off to the police office, where, when questioned, my tale was received as an aggravation of my crime, the questioner declaring that I must be the most impudent fellow in the world to invent such a fable, and to suppose that any one would be fool enough to believe it. My pockets were searched, my watch and purse were taken from me, and being considered as presumptive proofs of guilt, I was incarcerated. In vain did I entreat permission to send a letter to my wife, whose

state of mind I but too well could picture to myself; for even should the nurse have returned home with our child,—and I dare not trust myself to doubt it,—what would be my Francesca's agony and terror at my unaccountable disappearance!

"That was a dreadful evening and night; and even now I cannot revert to it without horror! I heard nothing but blasphemy and obscene ribaldry around me, as prisoner after prisoner was brought into that den of crime. I was mocked and insulted by the wicked wretches who shared my prison, for not all the reprimands and menaces of the constables could compel them to be silent. At length morning dawned, and again commenced the disgusting and terrible language of the malefactors, who, accustomed to a prison, had slept profoundly in it. At ten o'clock, I was taken before a magistrate, having to walk side by side with the thieves who had shared my prison.

Oh! the degradation of such companionship! I drew my hat over my eyes for concealment, forgetful that I was known to so few that I stood little chance of being recognised. The charge against me was read over, and so totally different was it from the real state of the affair, that I was stupified when I heard it.

"'What defence have you to make, prisoner? and what cause have you to shew why you should not be committed to take your trial?' demanded the magistrate.

"I was about to reply, and to state the facts as plainly as I could, when he, to my utter surprise, warned me not to say any thing that could militate against me on my trial. I had always previously believed that the duty of magistrates was to elicit the truth and dispense justice. But now it was him who was there to judge of my innocence or guilt who counselled me to silence.

" 'I will, I must speak the truth!' said I.

" 'Take care that you say nothing to criminate yourself,' replied the sapient magistrate.

" I was, however, not to be deterred by his advice from stating the case; and when I had so done, I was asked whether I could call on any one for a character.

" When I answered that I was a stranger in London, and had no friends or acquaintances, the magistrate shook his head, as if to signify that such an avowal was alone tantamount to an admission of guilt.

" 'A foreigner in London, with no friend or acquaintance! That, I must confess, looks suspicious,' said he. 'Remember, prisoner, I warned you not to criminate yourself. And what brought you to England, pray?'

" 'I came to see an uncle.'

" 'And where is this said uncle?'

" 'When I arrived, I had the misfortune to find that he had left England.'

" ' Humph!' said the magistrate, drawing a long breath; ' this looks very suspicious. And finding your uncle, whom you came to see, absent, why did you, without friends or acquaintances to tempt a prolongation of your stay, remain in England?'

" ' I had written to my friends in Italy, and waited to receive answers to my letters.'

" ' Why not write to France? You are a Frenchman, are you not?'

" ' No, I am an Italian.'

" ' Are you sure that you are not a Frenchman? Mind what you say. Don't criminate yourself!'

" I repeated the asseveration.

" ' Why, you reported the prisoner to be a Frenchman,' said the magistrate to a constable.

" ' Vy, your vorship, I took him to be a Frenchman; and so I now think as how he is, for all he denies it. But all them there

foreigners are just the same as this here chap; they'll swear to hanything, your vorship!'

"'And you know no one in London to whom you can refer for a character?' once more demanded the magistrate.

"Before I could repeat my former statement, another constable came up, and told the magistrate that Mr. Hemingsworth, who was in the office waiting for the examination of another prisoner, against whom he was to appear, had identified me, and was ready to give evidence against me. My utter astonishment at this statement may easily be imagined; nor when in Mr. Hemingsworth I recognised the jeweller to whom I had sold my diamond pin and emerald ring, did it abate; for what evidence he could offer to my prejudice I could not divine.

"'You know the prisoner, Mr. Hemingsworth?' demanded the magistrate.

"'Yes, your worship. Some time ago,

he came to my shop to dispose of a diamond pin and an emerald ring, both of which appeared to me too good to have belonged to this person; that is to say, to have been honestly acquired.'

"'So you did not buy them,' said the magistrate.

"'Why, your worship, he took me unawares, and before I had time for reflection, so I bought them; but when he had left my shop, I began to think that they had not been honestly come by, and I regretted having bought them.'

"'Of course, then, you have not disposed of them?' said the magistrate.

"'I am sorry to say I have, sir; for the examination I came here to attend is precisely about the diamond pin I bought from this person.'

"'You were wrong, in the first instance, in buying articles that you suspected to be stolen; and having bought them, you were

wrong in disposing of them, when you entertained such a suspicion.'

"'Your worship is quite right, it was indeed a great oversight on my part. I don't know how I came to commit such an error.'

"'Then you know nothing more of this prisoner than that he sold you the articles, too valuable, in your belief, to have come honestly into his possession?'

"'That is all, your worship; except that on the back of the ring a coronet was engraved.'

"'His having sold valuable trinkets, and one with a coronet too, certainly adds to the suspicions against him. I must now,' said the magistrate, 'commit you to take your trial, prisoner; a measure to which I should not have had recourse, if you had any respectable person who would give security for your appearance.'

CHAPTER XV.

"THE notion of being kept from my poor Francesca at a crisis when she most needed my presence, and of being unable to search for our dear child, operated much more on me than all the terrors of a prison, notwithstanding that the specimen I had had of one the night before had disgusted and revolted me. I therefore instantly resolved to have recourse to a measure in this emergency which no other would have induced me to adopt. I entreated the magistrate to permit me to write a few

lines to the Neapolitan Embassy; some one of the *attachés*, if not the Minister himself, would, I felt persuaded, on the receipt of it, immediately come and answer for me.'

"'Young man,' said the magistrate, gravely, 'let me caution you against trifling with justice. It was only a few minutes ago that you declared that you had no friend or acquaintance in London, nay, in England; yet now you propose to address yourself to the Neapolitan Embassy, and with apparent confidence allege that some one of the *attachés*,—which I suppose means secretaries, or even the Minister himself, will come to you. This looks suspicious, and you must explain the inconsistency before I dispatch a messenger with your letter, or even permit you to write one.'

"'When I told you, sir, that I knew no one in London, I only repeated the truth; but the Minister and his *attachés* will soon

recognise me from the statements I can give them, and will be able to satisfy you that I am incapable of meriting the suspicion on which I have been arrested.'

"'Then why not have immediately referred to the Minister?'

"'Because, sir, there is so much humiliation in exposing adversity to those who know my family and position, that my delicacy—my pride, if you will,—revolted from it.'

"'Then your pride is a very false and foolish one, to lead you to prefer remaining an hour under an ignominious charge, to calling on a person from your own country, and a person, too, filling so high a situation that his testimony will at once be satisfactory. There is pen and ink; write; and you, constable, have a man in readiness to take the letter with all speed to the Neapolitan Minister.'

"My letter was soon written and dis-

patched, and the magistrate's suspicions became considerably softened towards me. I was permitted to remain in the office, and allowed to take a seat—a condescension on his part which seemed greatly to excite the wonder of all those in the office. 'Send in Mr. Hemingsworth, and the prisoner charged with swindling him,' said the magistrate; and in marched the jeweller and a well-dressed young man of gentlemanly appearance, whose embarrassed manner denoted that his present position was a novel one to him. 'Let the charge be read,' said the magistrate. And it was. It set forth that the prisoner had purchased a diamond pin of Mr. Hemingsworth, for which he paid down, in bank-notes, fifty pounds—all the money he said he had about him—and promised to return the next day and bring the remainder of the purchase-money — twenty-five pounds. That two days having elapsed without his having so done, Mr. Hemingsworth, becoming

alarmed, had gone in search of him; and having seen him in the street had called a constable, and had him arrested as a swindler. 'What have you to answer, prisoner?' asked the magistrate. 'But be cautious; do not say anything to criminate yourself.'

"'When I left this person's shop, my banker's office was closed. I intended to return the next day, and pay him the twenty-five pounds, but I was taken ill with so severe a sore throat, that my physician insisted on my keeping my room for two days, and not thinking it very important whether I paid him two days later, I had, on the third day, when able to go out, drawn a check for a larger sum than the amount, intending to call and pay him, and was on my way to my banker's, to change it, when I was arrested. To avoid publicity, I consented to come with the constable, although I told the jeweller I would pay him if he would only let me

walk to my banker's, kept in view, but not guarded by the constable, but this he refused to do. This is the whole fact.'

"'And how much, Mr. Hemingsworth, did you pay for the pin?'

"'I don't exactly remember, your worship;' and the jeweller looked embarrassed as his eye met mine.

"'Perhaps your memory can be refreshed by the person who sold it to you,' observed the magistrate, 'and who, by an extraordinary coincidence, happens to be present.'

"'What sum did you receive for the diamond pin?' demanded he, addressing himself to me.

"'Twenty pounds.'

"'And so, Mr. Hemingsworth, you think it fair and honest to charge seventy-five pounds for a pin for which you gave twenty, and to arrest a gentleman who pays you fifty pounds in hand, and is to pay twenty-five more, merely because

he has allowed two days to elapse before he did so.'

"'Why, your worship, we in trade are obliged to be very particular, very much so, indeed, and as I did not happen to know who the gentleman is, I——'

"'You civilly judged him to be a swindler,' interrupted the magistrate, 'and had him arrested in the public street. This is not the conduct which I should have expected from a respectable trader, and, joined to the circumstance of your having given so small a price for the pin, tells much against your mode of transacting business. Will you favour me with your name, sir?' continued the magistrate, addressing the gentleman who had been arrested.

"'If you will permit me to do so privately, I have no objection.'

"The magistrate retired with the stranger for a few minutes, and when both again entered the office, I noticed a certain air of

respectful deference towards the late prisoner, in the manner of the magistrate, while that of the stranger was in no way changed from the simple and unaffected bearing I had previously remarked in him.

" ' Here, Mr. Hemingsworth, is the twenty-five pounds due to you by this gentleman,' said the magistrate. ' Your humblest apologies are due to him for the improper, very improper conduct you have thought it necessary to adopt towards him, and this gentleman will shew great condescension and kindness in overlooking it, and in not punishing you very severely for arresting him under your unfounded and stupid suspicion.'

The jeweller looked abashed and confounded, and attempted to extenuate his offence, but ere he completed his first phrase, the sound of carriage-wheels rattling up to the door, and a bustle in the waiting-room

announced some new arrival, and judge of my joyful surprise, when, in a moment after, I saw my dear uncle, the Marchese de Bonaventura, enter, and in the next, felt myself clasped in his arms. The Minister and he were just entering the carriage of the former, to pay a visit to a royal prince from Vienna, lately arrived, when my note was handed to the Minister, who having perused it, placed it in the hands of my uncle, and they instantly came off to my rescue. My kind uncle presented me to the Minister, who, being an old friend of my father's, evinced great satisfaction at seeing me, and was highly indignant at the insult to which I had been exposed.

"'How, my dear lord and fellow traveller, do I indeed see you here!' exclaimed my uncle, affectionately shaking hands with the gentleman who had been arrested as a swindler. An entreaty uttered in Italian,

not to mention his name, were the first words spoken in reply, while the warm shake hands was as warmly returned.

"'I have not been a voluntary visitor here, I assure you, my dear Marchese,' continued he; 'for this, my first appearance here, has been on a charge of swindling.'

"'Is it possible! An English peer accused of swindling, and an Italian nobleman taken up as a pickpocket! And this, too, in your land of liberty, as you call it! *Ma foi*, I think this is too much of the liberty. As you have been fellow-sufferers, I must make you acquainted with my nephew, that dear nephew, of whom you have heard us so frequently speak at the Palazza de Valentinois.'

"The English lord shook hands with me, and said many civil things of the kindness he had received from my family at Naples.

"'Pray, gentlemen, let us retire to my

private room,' said the magistrate. 'This way, your Excellency; this way, Marquis; this way, my lord; and you, sir;' bowing lowly to each, as he addressed them, and then to me—'I am truly grieved at your having been subjected to such annoyance.'

"Before, however, we had entered the next room, a new prisoner was brought into the office, and was announced to be the man who had picked a gentleman's pocket in the Park, the previous day. The articles stolen had been found on him, and he had been identified by no less than half-a-dozen witnesses, who came to give their evidence against him. This turned out, as I dare say you have already guessed, to be the person for whom I had been mistaken, merely because I had been seen running in the same direction. The magistrate said all that could be said on the occasion, of his regret at what had occurred, yet did not forget, while addressing me, on observing

the new prisoner about to speak, to remind him 'not to say anything to criminate himself.'

"Never did I behold more shame in countenances than was visible in those of Mr. Hemingsworth and the witnesses who had mistaken me for the pickpocket. The jeweller felt that he had lost the chance of good customers, and exposed his cupidity, and the witnesses saw that they had incurred the anger of the magistrate. I entered the coach of the Minister, with its owner and my uncle, and entreated the latter that it should at once take me to my humble abode at Bayswater.

"'*Ah, mia poveretta Francesca!*' said my uncle. 'I long to see her. You know not the pain, the wretchedness you have caused us all by so obstinately concealing yourself from us. Your father discovered that you had sailed in an English

merchantman, and guessed that you had fled to England, to be married, counting on the fondness of your old uncle to procure your pardon for your stolen nuptials; but why did you not write home?'

"While he spoke, I observed, for the first time, that he was in mourning, and a presentiment of evil tidings instantly oppressed me.

"'Why this sable dress?' exclaimed I. 'My father—my mother?'

"'They are well,' answered he, his countenance becoming very sombre.

"'My brother, my dear brother?' uttered I.

"He replied not for a moment, but held out his arms to me, and tears filled his eyes.

"'Alas! you have no longer a brother, my dear nephew,' said he. 'A fall from his horse, the very day you sailed from

Naples, caused his death.——It was this sad event,' said my uncle, after a pause, to allow my first burst of grief to have its course, announced to me by a special courier, that induced me to depart so suddenly from London, our good king permitting me to return to Naples, to console my poor brother. I naturally concluded that you would have immediately presented yourself at the Embassy, where I had left instructions with my friend the Minister to furnish you with funds to provide for your return to Naples, whither I concluded you would instantly return, on learning the death of your poor brother. The Minister was unfortunately absent for a few days, and the secretary, to whom he had confided his wishes with respect to you, was taken ill, so that when your marriage took place at the Embassy, no one there was aware that the untitled young pair who presented themselves, were

my nephew and niece, and as you did not leave your address, the Minister, when he returned, had no clue for finding you out. Arrived at Naples, I discovered that the only consolation calculated to heal the deep grief of your parents, was to have you and your wife quickly restored to them. I wrote instantly to the Minister to have you sought after in every direction, and rewards offered to any one who could give information of your residence. This measure proving unavailing, and the anxiety of your parents increasing, I left Naples in the belief that my long residence in London and knowledge of it, could enable me to be more successful in my search for you. I have been here some time, have devoted every thought, every hour, to the pursuit; and behold, how inscrutable are the ways of Providence! It is only by your having been arrested, by mistake, in the place of a criminal, that

you address yourself to the Embassy, where, for many months your presence, or the knowledge of your abode, would have given such satisfaction to all there, but above all, to your fond old uncle.' And my worthy relative again embraced me.

CHAPTER XVI.

"We had now reached my humble home, and I waited not until the loud knock of the Minister's footman had been answered, ere I leaped from the carriage, and rushing past the person who opened the door, ran up to the sitting room. It was empty, and with a foreboding heart I proceeded to the bedroom. I gently opened the door, and beheld my poor Francesca, pale as marble, reposing on her pillow, while Giuditta watched beside her. The good old woman made me a sign not to awake her mistress, and then,

on tip-toe, stole to me, and accompanied me into the next chamber. ‘ My child, Giuditta, —has my child been found?’

“ ‘ *Ohimé!* Signor Conte, you no longer have a child. A letter has been received from that terrible nurse, which says, that having been knocked down by a horse, in some street, when returning home, the *bambina* was flung from her arms, driven over, and killed on the spot. That she dared not present herself before you and la Signora Contessa, with this terrible news, and that she should never again return. Your disappearance, added to this fatal news, was too much for la Contessa. She spent the whole of last night in a state of delirium, and only half an hour ago dropped into sleep, caused by a narcotic administered to her by a doctor whom the mistress of the house had the charity to send for. *O, Dio mio,* Signor Conte; see the evils

brought on us by our flight from *cara Napoli! Ohimé! Nostra Santissima Madonna* seems to have abandoned us ever since we came into this land of heretics, who deny her power. The *cattivo occhio* has been on us ever since we came here. What but its influence could have snatched you away from us, Signor Conte, yesterday, when la Signora Contessa most required your presence, and have left her all the live-long night, maddened by terror and grief, wanting to rush into the streets, in search of her *bambina* and *marito*, one minute calling in frenzied accents on the one, and the next on the other. But Heaven be praised, you are restored to us, and she will now take patience under the heavy loss of her *bambina*.'

"Giuditta returned to her mistress, and I went to my uncle, who was seated in the little sitting-room, and had already learned

from the mistress of the house, the calamity that had befallen me, and the consequent illness of my poor Francesca.

"'Alas! my dear nephew,' said he, as he again embraced me, 'I find you have severely expiated your imprudent flight from Naples. To what humiliation and grief have you not been exposed? And my dear niece, too! Yet I am not without hope that your child still lives, and has only been carried off, to answer some object unknown to us. This good person,' turning to the mistress of the house, 'informed me that although she has had inquiries made all through the street in which the letter of the nurse stated the dreadful accident to have occurred, she has heard of nothing of the kind, yet such a catastrophe must have been known, had it really taken place. She has also had inquiries made at the different offices of police in the neighbourhood, where such events are notified, but all profess ignorance on the

subject. We are consequently not wholly hopeless; nevertheless, I think it wisest not to communicate our grounds for hope to our poor Francesca, lest they be doomed to disappointment. Let her be removed to my hotel as soon as her health admits, where she will find herself lodged more suitably to her station and fortune than in this confined abode, where every object around her will serve to keep alive the sense of her bereavement. I will instantly have advertisements inserted in all the papers, and placards, offering rewards for the discovery of the nurse and child, posted up, and sent round the town. An accurate description of both is now being written out by the mistress of this house, at my request, and I trust my efforts will be crowned with success. My faithful Luigi will immediately come here, to be of use to his old friend Giuditta; and remember, my dear nephew, that not only is your old uncle rich, but

that your good father has sent you ample funds to uphold your station.'

"My uncle left me, and I returned to watch, with Giuditta, by the bed-side of my poor Francesca. She slept long, but her slumber was often broken by starts and exclamations, in which my name and that of our infant were uttered in accents of such deep tenderness and mental agony, as brought tears into my eyes. How did I regret, as I marked the traces of care and sorrow already indented on that fair and youthful brow, that I had taken her from our paternal home to encounter the rude vicissitudes which had assailed her, and left such proofs of the injury they had inflicted on her. How, also, did I reproach myself, that in pursuance of the gratification of my own selfish schemes, I had been absent at the moment when my dear parents most required my presence to console them for the loss of my dear and ever-to-be-lamented

brother. Had I remained at home, how much sorrow would have been spared my parents and my wife. And my dear, my excellent brother, from whom I had parted, little dreaming it was for ever, without a word of farewell, without a parting embrace! A thousand fond and tender recollections of his invariable affection and unbounded generosity to me, rushed through my memory until my tears flowed plenteously. And *he*, in all the bloom of youth and health, so loved, so loving, was in a moment snatched away from life, and was for months mouldering in the tomb, while I dreamt not that I had no longer a brother, and mourned not his death. When the sad news of such bereavements reach us from afar, how do we look back to the days of their occurrence, in order to remember how we had been occupied on that eventful time, and whether some presentiment of evil had not haunted us, or some vague dream had not alarmed.

It seems so strange, so unnatural, that those dear to us as life itself should cease to be— should pass from the earth like shadows, leaving no trace behind, save in our memories, while we can remain in utter ignorance of such a calamity, eating, drinking, and sleeping — perchance smiling — when they were breathing their last sigh. But if we find that on such fatal days we had been engaged in light amusements, or scenes of festivity, with what a sentiment of remorse do we reflect on that want of prescience, which is nevertheless a blessing, by keeping us for some time ignorant of the evils impending over our devoted heads. These reflections occupied my mind as I watched over the couch of my poor Francesca, and when I heard her demand her child, that dear infant I had learned to love so fondly, a thousand fears for its safety pressed on my brain, and I longed to be able in person to assist in an active search for it. After

some hours, my beloved awoke. I had concealed myself behind the curtain, lest the surprise of seeing me too suddenly might prove too much for her weakened nerves. Her first question to Giuditta was, 'Has my husband returned?'

"'I have good tidings of him, carissima Contessa; he will be here anon.'

"'You trifle with me, you deceive me, Giuditta.'

"'No; I call *nostra Santissima Madre* to witness I speak the truth. Il Signor Conte will be here soon.'

"'But why comes he not at once—why is he absent when his Francesca is bowed to the earth by sorrow?' and she burst into tears.

"I could no longer bear to remain concealed; I pressed her to my heart, imprinted kisses on her poor pale face, and mingled my tears with hers, and, like a meek child, she laid her head on my breast, and mur-

mured a prayer of thanks for my restoration to her. And now, by degrees, I broke to her my meeting with my uncle, and the death of my dear brother, who was scarcely less dear to her than to me. Her sympathy alleviated my grief, and amid our tears for our babe, many dropped for that dear, kind brother, we should never more see.

"I removed her to the hotel where my uncle resided, and where I found a most comfortable suite of rooms ready for our reception. The fatherly affection of that worthy relative was a balm to the lacerated heart of my poor Francesca. He was the bearer to her of the full pardon of my parents, joined to innumerable fond messages; and crowned all by assuring her that they had obtained the Pope's dispensation for our marriage, as well as his eminence's benediction for us. This news took a weight off the mind of poor Giuditta, while it greatly soothed that of her mistress, whose gentle-

ness and mildness under the bereavement of our child endeared her still more to the heart of our uncle. It was now ascertained beyond a doubt that no child had been killed in the street, or in any of the neighbouring ones to that named in the letter of the nurse. This was a ray of hope, and, cheered by it, we left nothing undone to discover the child and the nurse. We offered large rewards for intelligence of them, and larger still for their apprehension, always concealing from Francesca that we had any reason for doubting the truth of the statement conveyed in the letter from the nurse, lest the anxiety of hope deferred, and perhaps eventually to be blighted, might prove too much for her delicate health. Day after day, and week after week, rolled away, yet brought us no intelligence of my child. The Neapolitan Minister, scarcely less anxious than my good uncle, employed every means in his power, while our ex-

cellent relative was indefatigable in his searches. But, alas! all were in vain; and as every letter from our parents breathed their impatience for our return, we at length took our departure for Italy. Doomed to disappointment as my hopes had hitherto been, I nevertheless could not leave England without inexpressible reluctance, having the conviction that in it my dear child was somewhere concealed. Francesca, ignorant of my thoughts on this point, only lamented that we knew not where the mortal remains of her firstborn had been deposited, that we might have had them removed to the vault of our ancestors, and gave many a tear to the reflection that its dust should not mingle with ours. Had she known my hope of its existence, never would she have left the country that she believed contained it. But though we departed, every precaution was taken to keep the search as actively carried on

as while I was on the spot. The Neapolitan Minister was charged with this task, and I was to be kept informed of its results. Mrs. Fector, the person at Bayswater at whose house we had lodged, was also employed to look out for the nurse, whose person she could identify, and a large reward was assured her could she but discover her. We ascertained, that owing to our ignorance in not paying the postage, my letters to Naples had never gone; so this had explained the silence of my family.

"We arrived safely at Naples, were received with doting affection by our parents, and devoted ourselves wholly to consoling them for the loss of my dear brother. Years rolled on, yet no tidings had ever been received of our lost child, and Francesca's delicacy of health left me little hope of her blessing me with another. This was the only drop wanting in our cup of happiness, and bitterly did we feel it. Never could

the bereaved mother see a female child, whose age was that which our lost one would have been, that she did not gaze on it with eyes filled with tears; and remind me that our treasure, had Heaven spared her to us, would have been as tall as the child she was looking on. She would have drawings made of girls of similar age, and instruct the artist to paint them with features resembling mine; and, gazing on these ideal pictures, she would say, 'Just such would our Francesca have been!' and she would melt into tears at the contemplation. My father and mother dropped gently into the grave,—their last years soothed by our love and care, and blessing us for our dutiful affection! And now I became the representative of the ancient title, and possessor of the large fortune, of my ancestors. The desire to return to England, in the vague hope of hearing tidings of my child, haunted me; yet I feared to propose it to my wife, lest it

should awaken anew her regret, and to leave her would be difficult, as we had never been separated. We had gone to Milan to visit some friends there, when the lady at whose house we were staying received an account that her only son was dangerously ill at Paris. Unable, from her advanced age, to undertake the journey herself, though most anxious to do so, I offered to go; and my wife consented to remain, to comfort our aged hostess, while I proceeded to Paris. It was then and there I met you, my young friend; and the sight of the youthful beauty you escorted,—so wonderfully like my wife, —produced such an effect on my feelings, that hopes once again sprang up in my heart, which reason has not been able to vanquish. These hopes, pent up in my own breast, have so excited my nerves, that my health has suffered; and the physicians consulted, by my desire advised me to try the effect of travelling in a cooler climate

than our own. The Duchessa instantly consented to visit England, where we lately arrived; and, strange to say, after so many years of baffled hope, something like reasonable grounds for it has now presented itself. But before I communicate it to you, pray tell me something of the young lady whose striking resemblance to my wife is so surprising. Is her parentage so well known as to admit of no doubt that my child might have been, by some means, substituted in the family for their own. That likeness is too strong, the features and the expression too remarkably similar, to be accidental."

"Alas! I can give you no hope. That young lady is the daughter of Lady Selina Mellingcourt, whose husband died only seven months ago. She is the heiress to a large fortune, inherited from Mr. Mellingcourt, and is a ward of the Court of Chancery."

"But the likeness, the wonderful likeness! You yourself were struck with the

resemblance to the portrait of my wife; and I never beheld mother and daughter so like!"

"I acknowledge the resemblance to be striking; yet one sometimes sees such remarkable likenesses between persons in no way connected, that no faith can be attached."

"Not such likenesses as the one in question!" interrupted the Duca de Valentinois, with a warmth of manner that led me to think he indulged an infatuation on this point that indicated, indeed, no ordinary excitement of nerves. "Nay more," resumed the Duca; "although perhaps you will smile at such an assertion, I felt, when I beheld that young lady, a sentiment of interest that I could neither account for nor subdue. It was with the utmost reluctance that I could tear myself from her presence; and when I had done so, I blamed myself for not having, however extraordinary such

a proceeding might have appeared to her friends, inquired into her parentage, so convinced was I that such a resemblance could not be, as you imagine it, accidental. But, to return to the communication which has reached me since my arrival in London, I omitted to tell you that, previously to my leaving England, I purchased the lease of the house at Bayswater in which my child had been born, and permitted Mrs. Fector, the woman we had lodged with in it, to reside there rent free, on condition that she would not leave it; hoping that some time or other remorse might induce the nurse to come forward and confess the truth, in which case she might be tempted to seek the house in which she had left us. The day after my arrival, I went to that humble dwelling, so fraught with melancholy recollections; and judge of my emotion on learning from its inmate, that only the previous evening she had seen the nurse

of my child at St. George's Hospital, where she had been to visit a sick friend. The nurse was a patient in that hospital, and was to suffer amputation the next day for some fracture in her leg. She did not recognise Mrs. Fector, who, however, remembered her immediately, and would have at once questioned her, but that the surgeon in attendance would not allow her to be spoken to. I instantly went to the hospital, ascertained that the operation had taken place, and having seen the surgeon, was assured by him that I should see the patient as soon as with safety to her the interview could take place, or that in case of danger I should be sent for, and allowed to speak to her. Every hour has appeared to me an age since then. The happiness of my future life depends on the communication this wretched woman has to make to me. Oh! if my child still lives, and that she can be restored to me, what joy can

equal mine! Every hope on this point paints my daughter in the image of that never-to-be-forgotten young lady I beheld with you; and should my restored child not resemble her, I shall scarcely think I have indeed found the daughter of my Francesca. But you must come and be made known to the Duchessa, and then—although, alas! time and ill-health have robbed her cheeks of their roses and her eyes of their brightness, —you will still be struck with the likeness that has brought such conviction to my mind."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE next day Mr. Rivers and I waited on the Duca and Duchessa de Valentinois, and, though prepared to find a strong resemblance between her and Selina, I confess I was startled when I beheld her. Her smiles, no less than her features, were wonderfully similar, and the soft tones of her voice possessed the same flexibility and sweetness. The Duchessa was indeed a most charming person. Now in her thirty-sixth year, she still retained so much of her pristine beauty that she might have passed for being

some years younger. The sight of this lovely and gentle being reminded me so forcibly of Selina when recovering from the fatigue of attending on her father, and subdued into sadness by his death, that I was greatly agitated when I beheld the Duchessa and her husband, who noticed my emotion, and was so highly gratified at this proof of the force of the resemblance, that he was compelled to control himself to prevent exhibiting the marks of his satisfaction before his wife, to whom he dared not explain the cause.

I now became a daily visitor at their hotel, and acted as their cicerone, in shewing them the environs of London. My intimacy with them soon ripened into the most cordial friendship; and as the character of the Duchessa unfolded itself to me, how was I reminded of Selina's! The same deep feeling, the same faultless temper, and total freedom from aught approaching to

selfishness. The Duca de Valentinois also was a most estimable person; full of warm sympathies with all that is good or elevated in our nature, with a chivalrous sense of honour, and a tenderness of heart that soon endeared him to all who became acquainted with him. How Selina would love and reverence this pair! was a reflection that occurred to me every day that I passed with them; and I found that if I could ever hope to school my heart into the indifference necessary for the recovery of my peace of mind, it could never be while daily beholding one who so powerfully reminded me of her. Selina and Madame de Stourville had been some weeks absent from London, on a visit to the country-seat of the worthy Master in Chancery; so that the repeated desire expressed by the Duca de Valentinois to behold her again, and to make her acquainted with the Duchessa, had hitherto been met by the simple state-

ment of the fact of her being absent from London. When she returned, and that the presentation was to take place through the medium of Mr. Rivers, it would be necessary for me to leave London; for I dare not trust even to the chance of encountering her in her carriage in the street, much less to meeting her in a room. Yet I felt that I should resign the daily intercourse now established between the Duca and Duchessa Valentinois and myself with great pain. Nevertheless, ought I, from selfishness, to preclude Selina—who had so few friends, and, above all, female friends—from forming one in every way so eligible as the Duchessa? No; when she returned I would depart for Meredith Park, and leave her free to form an intercourse that must prove delightful to all parties. The Duca and Duchessa expressed so much regret when I spoke of the necessity of my leaving town, that I ventured to invite them to pay me a

visit in the country; and this offered a consolation for my resolution of resigning their society for a time.

Although I made it a point to question Mr. Rivers as seldom as possible relative to her who occupied all my thoughts, I had learned various particulars connected with her. The old, having outlived those feelings peculiar to youth, and their passions—as far as regards the affections—being under the influence of reason, they are ever prone to believe that the empire of love is much less despotic, and of a much more brief duration, than it really is. Hence Mr. Rivers imagined, that as all hope of my ever being united to Selina was destroyed, nay, that as to love her otherwise than as a sister was now a sin, my affection would at once subside into the calm one consonant to our newly-discovered relationship, and that other feelings, with other ties, would spring up in our hearts to replace the pas-

sionate ones that had lately existed. And so I prayed it might be. Yet I was still far from having made any progress towards that desirable change.

While my life was supposed to be in danger, Selina imagined, and led those around her to entertain the same belief, that, could I be restored to health, she would submit without murmuring to the separation which Mr. Rivers had told her must henceforth divide our destinies. Her alarm and anxiety during my illness betrayed to her friends the depth and devotion of that attachment, the extent of which her reserve and female dignity had hitherto prevented them from judging. But so pure, and so wholly free from all selfish alloy, was her affection, that the artless demonstrations of it, revealed when my recovery was deemed all but hopeless, increased the respect and esteem entertained towards her by all who witnessed them, and excited the liveliest

sympathy in their breasts for her. Even Madame de Stourville, albeit unused to the indulgence of melancholy emotions which had no source in self, took a warm part on this occasion in the anxiety of her *chère et bonne demoiselle;* and declared, that "*la grave maladie de ce pauvre* Monsieur Meredis vas von proof of lofe dat greatly raised him in her opinion, and made her tink he vas not like Monsieur Rivére or Monsieur Vincent — *volage et infidel!*"

While I was cultivating the friendship of the Duca and Duchessa de Valentinois, and becoming every day more attached to them, Selina was vainly endeavouring to reconcile herself to her altered position, and to submit to a separation pronounced to be inevitable, from the person whom, for so many months, she had learned to look on as the future partner of her life. The efforts made to effect this revolution in her feelings

seriously injured her health; and although she sedulously sought to conceal the symptoms of her indisposition, her altered looks and low spirits revealed that her mind was ill at ease. Nothing was left undone by the worthy Herberts to amuse and cheer her. Little excursions to see the neighbouring seats were frequently made; but though grateful for their kindness, it failed to have the desired effect, and the barbed arrow of blighted affection and disappointed hopes still rankled at her heart. What could be the mysterious cause of breaking off her nuptials, only the evening previous to their celebration? and why was she no more to see him to whom her vows had been pledged? were questions that presented themselves to her continually. But while these thoughts occupied and agitated her, she forbore—such was her maidenly reserve and pride—making a single inquiry on the subject to those around her. Not so Ma-

dame de Stourville. That garrulous lady had a thousand guesses to make, each and all remote from the real cause; and as many questions to ask of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert, who were not willing, if able, to gratify her curiosity. Nor had she sufficient delicacy to forbear commenting on the subject to Selina, who, as may easily be conceived, shrank from all reference to it with dismay. When the dear girl looked more than usually pale, or that her eyes shewed the traces of tears, Madame de Stourville would exclaim—

"*Helàs! mon cher et bel ange*, de men are all de same. Monsieur Meredis is just like Monsieur Rivére; he make de lofe until he vin de poor heart, and den he go avay. It vas in dis manner dat Monsieur Vincent did also act to me. He say *des jolies choses* enough to make any voman vain, and ven I tink he lof me vid passion, he go off, and not so much as say, Adieu. *Mais c'est*

fini pour ma part. Jamais—non jamais vill I lofe any man no more! Dey are all de same; and I have been so often deceived, dat I vill believe no man no more. Take de courage, *ma chère*, and do not despair. Look at me, Marie Antoinette de Stourville; you see I have de good healt, de good spirits,—*ah! ma foi*, and de bon appetite *aussi*, yet I have had de heart broke ever so many times! De first time it is terrible, and very hard to bear, and von does veep and fret very much; but every time after dat, it becomes less painful, until at last it is almost noting at all. So take courage, *ma chère*, by my example."

"You will oblige me by referring no more to this subject," would Selina say; and Madame de Stourville, observing that she had inflicted pain, would promise to name it no more. But in a short time after she would forget her promise, and again revert to it; always instituting compari-

sons between the conduct Selina had experienced, and that to which, by her own telling, she had been so frequently subjected.

Mr. and Mrs. Herbert, observing that Selina's delicacy of health and dejection of spirits, increased instead of diminishing, returned to London with her for the purpose of consulting a physician. Air and exercise were recommended, and Kensington Gardens were pointed out as affording a desirable place for the enjoyment of both. To this spot, then, did the carriage of Mr. Herbert convey Selina, his daughter, and Madame de Stourville, every fine day; and while the latter, too cumbrous for pedestrian exercise, sat in an alcoved seat, amusing herself by the perusal of a French novel, the young ladies paced up and down the long walk in front of it, conversing. Often did they find Madame de Stourville in tears, and she would say, "Ah! I had ar-

rived at such an interesting part of de book! Oh! it did make me veep. Dere is noting —no, noting in all de vorld like de French novel. It make von laugh, it make von cry, all in von minute; and ven von has no chagrin of von's own, it is so pleasant to read of the chagrin of oders. De hero of de book is von *scélérat*. He deceive de poor heroine, who is so good, so *aimable; mais, malgré*, he is *infidel* and vicked, he is *si joli garçon* and *si spirituel*, dat no voman could help lofing him."

"Surely, if the heroine knew that he was unworthy," would Miss Herbert say, "she could no longer like him."

"But if she could not help lofing him? *ma chère Mademoiselle Herbert.*"

"I do not admit the possibility of continuing to love an object that one has discovered to be unworthy, Madame."

"O! you English have de heart so cold, and de reason so strong, you know not de

power of de tender passion. 'Tis de French dat understand dat. Dey are always in lofe—*toujours*, *toujours*. Dey lofe ven dey are young, dey lofe ven dey are of a certain age, and dey lofe ven dey are vat you call old."

A faint smile would steal over the lips of Selina as she listened to the false sentiment of the silly old French woman; while Miss Herbert could scarcely restrain the mirth it excited in her within bounds.

The surgeon having pledged himself that the woman should not be allowed to leave the hospital without the Duca de Valentinois being apprised of it, and his health really being affected by the excitement in which his mind was kept by his anxiety to see the nurse, I persuaded him and the Duchessa to fulfil their promise of paying me a visit, and to accompany me for a few days to Meredith Park, to which place the surgeon was to write to him the moment his

patient was in a fit state to have the desired interview. How the sight of that home, to which I had hoped to have brought *one*, whom even to think of, was now to me forbidden, affected me. The rooms fitted up to receive her, the different objects of taste and *vertu*, arranged as I fancied she would have liked them, only reminded me that henceforth life would be to me a joyless waste, in which happiness could no more be hoped for, and resignation must be the vista to which my expectations were to point. The Duca and Duchessa were delighted with Meredith Park. Its velvet lawns and blooming parterres, but above all, its fresh verdure, was most agreeable to them, after having been for some weeks shut up in a London hotel. When I heard the Duchessa point out what most pleased her in the grounds, and decorations of the apartments, and which were precisely those I had planned to meet the anticipated views of Selina, I

could not help being struck by the similarity of their tastes, and a train of melancholy reflections was awakened in my mind, the symptoms of which not all my efforts could conceal from my valued guests. Women have a peculiar talent of extracting the secrets of the heart, even from those not generally disposed to betray them. They are so quick-sighted in all that concerns the affections, and so prone to sympathize with the unhappy, that he who is suffering from the pangs of disappointed love must be made of sterner stuff than I was, could he have resisted to reveal his grief to such a woman as the one then an inmate in my house. Before a week had passed at Meredith Park, the Duchessa de Valentinois was mistress of the secret cause of the depression of spirits she had remarked in me, and her pity alleviated, though it could not remove, my chagrin. She loved to talk of Selina, would ask various questions

about her, and evinced an interest towards that admirable girl, that attached me still more to my amiable guest. As the Duchessa had no secrets from her husband, he was soon made acquainted with mine, and his warm and affectionate nature made him enter with a lively sympathy into the cruel disappointment, under the effects of which I was still smarting. Friendship, a boon so precious at all times, becomes an inestimable blessing when care and sorrow press heavily on the heart; and I never was so sensible of this as when daily, hourly experiencing the soothing influence of the society of two persons whose quick sensibility and refined sentiments I had so truly learned to appreciate.

"Ah! Mr. Meredith," would the Duchessa de Valentinois say, "had my daughter lived, she would have been about the age of the charming Selina. How I long to see her; yet, as whenever I am to have that pleasure

I must resign your society for the time, and that I think our presence comforts you, I ought hardly to wish for her acquaintance. Is it not strange what an interest I feel in this stranger? Even before I knew you, I quite longed to see her, and to discover if indeed she bears so strong a resemblance to me as my husband says. Have you noticed the likeness? or does it merely exist in his imagination?"

When I had acknowledged that I also was struck with the resemblance, the Duchessa would sigh, and again express her desire to see the fair counterpart of herself; and the Duca would shake his head, and say—

"*Cara mia*, the sight of her will have the same effect on you that it had on me; it will only awaken fruitless regrets and unavailing wishes."

"I fear," would the Duca say to me, when we were alone, "that if my poor

Francesca sees Miss Mellingcourt, the same wild hopes may spring up in her heart (occasioned by the wonderful likeness) that has taken possession of mine, even though she knows not that I have had any reason to doubt the reported death of our daughter. How painful is this harassing state of uncertainty! Oh! when will it terminate!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

The impatience of the Duca de Valentinois to see the nurse of his daughter increased every day, and at length became so ungovernable that he determined, although he had received no communication from the surgeon, to return to London. The Duchessa, who liked the country, and felt happy at Meredith Park, wished to remain there a few days longer, and when her husband refused to stay, observed that he had become so whimsical and capricious of late, that she hardly could believe him to be the same

complaisant person he had always hitherto been, and accused him of having the English malady, the spleen, which she had heard was the cause that Englishmen were always moving from place to place. The Duca gave me a melancholy look, while admitting to his wife that he supposed our climate had produced this effect, and the next day we left Meredith Park for London. The Duca became a daily inquirer at St. George's Hospital, but was still prevented from having an interview with the person he so impatiently longed to see, the surgeon asserting that any excitement might be attended with dangerous consequences to his patient, until her leg was healed.

At length, however, he was permitted to see her, and her alarm on recognising him, which she soon did, almost overpowered her. She covered her face with her hands, and trembled like an aspen leaf.

"Oh, sir, I have wronged—I have injured

you!" said she; "and bitterly have I paid for it, for ever since I have not had a happy hour."

"Only tell me that my child lives, that she can be restored to my arms, and I will pardon you—nay, I will give you gold enough to make you comfortable, if not rich, for the rest of your days."

"Woe is me, sir, that I cannot satisfy you about your child. Ah! could I do so, I should not require gold; for, to ease my troubled conscience, I would, were it in my power, say and do everything that could restore her to you."

"Then the statement of the child being killed was a fabrication?"

"Yes, sir, it was. I thought that if you believed her to be dead, you would cease all search, and be less unhappy than if you imagined her to be alive, and probably in bad hands. Have patience with me, sir, and I will tell you the truth—yes, sir, the

whole truth, as some atonement for my guilt. I was a chambermaid, sir, at an hotel in London, when I had the misfortune to become a victim to a gentleman from the Havannah, who lodged there. I will not attempt to extenuate my sin, though I might do so without falsehood, for it was not by affection that I fell, but by nefarious arts — yes, sir, indeed it was. So great was the terror with which he inspired me, that I dared not reveal the truth, and from that hour I became his slave, and trembled at his nod.

"When the consequences of my shame obliged me to leave the hotel, he took for me an obscure lodging, in which he often visited me. He sometimes came at night, and was occasionally in such violent rages that I often feared he would kill me. Oh, sir! he was a terrible person, dreaded neither man nor God, and gave free course to his evil passions. He was a gamester, too;

and when he lost, his anger knew no bounds. He would utter curses on his bad luck; but, above all, on a rich brother he had, who grudged him, as he used to say, the necessaries of life. He formed an intimacy with the maid of this brother's wife, to get at, as he said, the secrets of her mistress; and nothing passed in the house of that lady that he was not soon made acquainted with. He came to me, the day after I was confined of a little boy, and said, that in a few days I must give up the infant, for that he had discovered that his sister-in-law pretended to be with child, in order to impose on her husband; and that she intended to have a new-born infant brought secretly by her maid, who was looking out for one, which was to be passed for her own. 'Now this child will be heir to a great fortune,' said he, 'and so ours shall have it. And when my brother dies, I will let our boy know, that, being illegi-

timate, he has no right to the fortune, and that if he does not share it half and half with me, I will denounce him, and so have him turned adrift. I will, besides, tell him he is no relation to his pretended mother, whom I see sometimes, and who thinks she imposes on me by her pillow worn to counterfeit being in the family way. Her maid is my creature, and has told me everything.'

"That night, as if it were a punishment for his guilty schemes, my poor baby died. His rage was terrible when he heard of it,—not that he cared for the poor infant, but that its death crossed his plans. 'You must immediately go out as a wet-nurse,' said he, 'and steal the child confided to you, that I may substitute it for ours. I shall, whenever it grows up and inherits, persuade it that it is mine; by which means, and by menaces of denouncing its

birth, I shall keep the rich person wholly in my power.'

"I had, by becoming a mother, learned to know the feelings of one; and though a fallen woman, I shrank from robbing a mother of her child; and as I looked on my poor dead infant, this repugnance to wound another mother's heart grew stronger on me. I ventured to say something of this, but he only jeered and mocked me, and, in a day or two after, compelled me to leave my bed, and crawl out to a doctor's, to inquire for the place of a wet-nurse. Fearing that my paleness might prevent my being engaged, he put some red powder from his pocket-book on my cheeks, made me drink porter, and accompanied me to the doctor's door. I was examined, and recommended to your lady. She had been confined that day, and I went to take charge of the baby in the evening. When I wrote to him, as he told

me to be sure to do, that the child was a girl, he was very angry; but said, that the first opportunity that offered I must steal the infant. When I saw how the mother loved the child, it went to my heart to rob her of it; but he wrote me such threatening letters, that I dared not disobey him, and on that day when I disappeared from your house, he had been waiting for me some time, and had a hackney-coach in readiness, into which he made me enter, and carried me off to a lodging he had engaged in an obscure lane. That night he took the child to the maid of the lady, for whose it was to be made pass, and I wrote a few lines to you, sir, to say your child was no more. I had his orders to go the next day to offer myself as wet-nurse at the same house to which the child had been taken. I was instructed by him not to acknowledge that he was known to me, or that I ever saw the baby before, but merely to say, that I had heard

that a wet-nurse was wanting, and that I offered myself for the place. I had grown fond of your child, sir, and I was anxious to nurse and take care of it, which made me more readily fall into his plans. Before he took the child away, he marked the sole of one of its little feet with gunpowder and a needle, that, as he said, in case it might ever be changed, he might have the means of recognising it.

" I went to the house as desired, saw the lady's maid, was engaged, and had the dear baby once more put into my arms. I could hardly conceal my satisfaction when I felt its dear little lips again draw its sustenance from my bosom, the maid telling me all the time, that the baby had been sucking her finger all the night and morning,—it was such a healthy, ravenous little thing. She said that her lady had intended to nurse it herself, which was the reason a wet-nurse had not been provided; but that she

was so weakly, she found she could not undertake it. I now saw the lady daily. She pretended to be very fond of the child; but whenever it cried, it was easy to see *she* was not its mother, by her impatience and ill-humour; and even if I did not know the imposition, I think I should have guessed that there was something wrong. My persecutor came often, and generally to the lady's maid's room, where I always sat,—she scarcely letting me out of her sight, or permitting me to speak to any of the other servants. He affected not to notice me, but seemed rather to like the child. It was plain that the lady's maid was wholly under his command, and fondly attached to him; for even prudence could not prevent her from letting it be seen. I was well treated, and liberally paid; nevertheless I was far from happy, for my conscience continually reproached me, and I could not look on your child without thinking of the

pain I had inflicted on its mother's and your heart. The husband of the lady never came near the house; and on my asking one day whether or not she was a widow, I was told that she was separated from him. My tyrant—for I still trembled at his nod—sometimes came to visit the lady. She would on such occasions send for me to shew him the child, and ask him if he did not think it very like his brother, she believing all the time that she had imposed upon him, while it was *she* that was successfully imposed upon by him and her deceitful maid, on whom she lavished costly presents, in the faith that her secrets were safe in her keeping. Oh, sir! the wicked and deceiving are in turn cheated by those they most trust, and I never saw such treachery and deception as was practised in that house; the lady thinking she imposed on her brother-in-law, and *he* cheating and laughing at both mistress and maid.

"When the child was ten months old she was weaned, and in two months after, her supposed father claimed and took her. I saw her carried away with a sad heart and streaming eyes, and never beheld her since. The lady herself knew not where she was taken to, nor did my persecutor, for he was ill in a fever when she was carried off. When he recovered, he came to see the lady, who pretended to cry very much at her child, as she said, having been taken from her. While she held her handkerchief to her eyes, to conceal that there were no tears in them, he gave such a smile and wink to the lady's maid, that she was obliged to turn her head lest her smiles should be seen; and then he gave me a glance like lightning, and pointed to the maid, whom he equally duped as the mistress by having introduced me, who knew all, into the house. Having no further employment for me, I was discharged, but received so good a character from the

lady, that I procured a situation as nurse-maid in a family going to Ireland. Previously to my entering their service, the wicked man who had exercised such an influence over me, compelled me to take an oath never to reveal his name, or that of the lady, to any human being, until he called on me to prove the facts I have related to you, sir, or that his death released me from my oath.

"'If I die before you,' said he, 'you may reveal the whole story, for then secrecy can no longer be of any service to me, and your confession may bring some reward to yourself; but recollect, that *if* you break your oath, no distance, no place of concealment, shall screen you from my vengeance, which shall be as terrible as it will be sure, and rapid in overtaking you.' Night and day, that threat has hung over me, and though I have never seen that terrible man since, my terror of him has in no way abated. I

remained in Ireland seven years, and when I returned to London, I went to the house in which the lady had resided while I nursed your child as hers. She was not known there, nor have I seen or heard of her, until some weeks ago, when crossing a street with a basket of clothes on my head, for I have been a laundress for some years, I was knocked down, and driven over by a post-chaise, and my leg so severely injured, that amputation was afterwards found necessary. The chaise was stopped by the police, when a lady in it gave me five pounds, and her address. In that lady, though greatly changed by time, I recognised her to whom your child had been taken; and in her female attendant, the woman who then acted as her maid, and was the creature of her terrible brother-in-law. They, too, I think recognised me, for they exchanged looks, and when I afterwards sent to the address

they gave me, I found no such persons were known there."

"Unhappy woman," said the Duca de Valentinois, who had listened with breathless anxiety to her narrative, "how can you suppose that an oath unlawfully extorted to conceal guilt, and to defraud parents of their child, ought to prevent you from atoning for the great crime which you committed in stealing that child, by furnishing them with the names of those through whom it may yet be discovered. Think of the grief we have for years undergone for the loss of our daughter; think of the years of happiness of which you have aided to rob us; and now, I pray you, make a late amends, by declaring to me the guilty persons connected in this wicked plot."

"Oh, sir, consider the sacredness of an oath! And that terrible man's vengeance!"

"I will protect you from it. The laws

of your country will protect you, and the ministers of your religion will tell you, that no oath extorted from you for the concealment of crime and guilt, can be binding, or ought to be kept."

Vain would it be to recapitulate the arguments used by the Duca de Valentinois, to persuade this weak-minded and ignorant woman to reveal the names he so ardently longed to know, or the promises of golden rewards held out to her. Such, however, was the terror she entertained from the threats of him whom she termed her persecutor, and to whom she attributed all the ills of her life, that no reasoning or persuasions could induce her to break faith with him, although she felt disposed to atone to the Duca for the injury she had been the means of inflicting on him. It was now found necessary to have recourse to legal measures. The testimony of the woman in St. George's Hospital was taken down by a

solicitor, and witnessed by respectable persons; and she being now able to leave the hospital, was placed in a lodging in the identical house at Bayswater from which she had stolen the child, with strict injunctions to the owner of it, and a steady man placed purposely in the house to assist her, not to let the woman leave the house without one of them accompanying her wherever she went, lest she should escape. This she, however, was by no means disposed to do, being well content to enjoy not only the necessaries, but the comforts of life, amply provided her by the generosity of the Duca; and moreover, being now incapacitated by the loss of her leg, and the weakness resulting from her long illness and confinement, from earning her own subsistence.

This woman had not been above a week in her new abode, when, seated at the window, she saw a coach stop at the door, and two females descend from it, who having paused

to read a bill stating that lodgings were to be let, pasted on the next window, knocked at the door, and entered the room next to the one in which she was, and the door of which was open. The voices instantly struck her as being familiar to her ear, and she soon recognised them to be those of the lady and her maid, whose names she was sworn not to reveal. She heard them demand the terms of the house, and then, accompanied by the mistress, ascend to view the apartments, she trembling all the while with agitation, lest they should not agree for the lodgings. A vague notion of the hand of Providence directing them to the very house she was in, the very dwelling, too, whence she had stolen the child passed off for being that of the lady now beneath its roof, greatly excited her. Surely this working of Providence was, must be, to lead to the discovery of the stolen child, and to restore her, if alive, now a woman grown,

to that good Duca who had shewn her, who had wronged him so fearfully, such generosity and pity. And this lady and her maid, whose carriage had occasioned her the loss of her leg, and who had given her a false address, and never shewn the least pity for her fate, were now in the same house with her—were in her power—and by giving them up to the Duca, he might wring from them a disclosure of the truth, without her having broken her oath to the terrible man, at the bare notion of whom she still trembled. She was in an agony, lest they should leave the house without taking the lodgings. She could not move to ring the bell, in order to desire the man placed in the house by the Duca to follow, and ascertain their abode, and she was afraid to call out, lest they should recognise her voice, and so take alarm. Great was her joy when she heard them descend, and tell the woman of the house that they

would come and take possession of the apartments that evening. When asked for a reference, the lady paid down a month's rent in advance, and said she thought that a more simple arrangement than giving the trouble of making inquiries of her friends. Still the nurse trembled, lest they might, after all, not return; so when they left the house, she begged to have the man sent to watch them, and remained in a state of indescribable excitement for the rest of the day. They did keep their engagement, and took possession of their lodgings late that evening; and as the nurse heard in that small house the voice of the maid demanding the different objects she required for the use of her mistress, and the tone of impertinent familiarity she presumed to adopt towards that mistress, she acknowledged that there is no such leveller of distinctions as guilt, save the grave.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE next morning, she despatched a messenger to request the presence of the Duca, but word was brought her back that the Duca had left town for the day, and was not expected back until late in the evening. She trembled, lest something might occur before the Duca came, and when, towards the evening, the lady and the maid together left the house, her fears were excited, lest they might not return. Again she employed the man to follow them, and again she counted, with breathless impatience and anxiety, the

hour for their return. When they came back, the man, who had not lost sight of them, informed her, that the whole time of their absence had been passed in perambulating Kensington Gardens, where they seemed to be engaged in watching some person, or persons, who were there. That they had frequently advanced towards two young ladies who were walking together, but that they seemed to want courage to approach them, and that at length, on seeing the young ladies joined by a lady and gentleman, they had retired, and returned to the house.

Mr. Rivers and I were engaged to dine with the Duca and Duchessa de Valentinois on that day, at their hotel; and having learned from Mr. Rivers that Selina had arrived in London some days before, I had determined to take my leave of them that evening, and set out next morning for Meredith Park. I felt more than usually de-

pressed as I drove to their hotel, and came to the resolution of leaving England for some months, if not years; so convinced did I feel, that while I remained in the same country with Selina, I should never recover that peace of mind which was now all I dared hope for.

Great was my surprise when I entered, to find the Duchessa de Valentinois, hitherto always so calm and placid, in a state of extreme excitement.

"Oh, Mr. Meredith!" exclaimed she, "I have seen her! I have seen her! Yes, my husband was right; she is as like my portrait, painted when I was young, as it is possible to be, and I wonder not he was struck with the resemblance. Never did any creature produce such an effect on my feelings. I was drawn to her by an irresistible and incontrollable impulse, and longed, yes, passionately longed, to press her to my heart! You must think me

weak, foolish, mad, but I cannot help it. I am no longer mistress of myself; this dear girl has fascinated, has bewitched me. Oh how many tender, yet bitter, reflections has the sight of her called up in my mind! I now mourn afresh the loss of my daughter, when I think that such as this charming creature is, she might have been," and the Duchessa wept, and betrayed the deepest emotion.

"When did this meeting occur?" asked I of the Duca.

"Returning from Richmond, where I had taken my wife for a little fresh air, we were tempted to enter Kensington Gardens. While walking there, we encountered two young ladies, one of whom the Duchessa had no sooner looked at than she pressed my arm, and exclaimed, 'Look there! that young person must surely be Miss Mellingcourt, for she certainly has a most extraordinary resemblance to my picture!'

I instantly recognised her to be the young lady I had seen at the Jardin des Plantes, and taking off my hat, I approached and addressed her. She, too, remembered me; and I presented her to my wife, who trembled with emotion as she examined her countenance. The dear girl evinced something more than mere politeness towards us; and when I told her that the agitation of the Duchessa, on beholding her, proceeded from her being so struck with her likeness to herself, and the thought that had our only child lived she would now have been her age, and if she resembled her, our pride and happiness; she extended her hand to my wife, and, with a sweetness of manner that melted us both, addressed her in Italian. Her voice and accent, so wonderfully similar to Francesca's, heightened the impression made on us both. We conversed with her for some time, each moment increasing the magnetic

influence she has acquired over us, and we parted not from her until we had obtained her permission to visit her to-morrow."

"Oh, my friend! could I but behold this dear girl daily," said the Duchessa, "how happy should I be! I would give up my own bright land, and become a resident in England, merely to be near her."

"Be calm, my own Francesca!" whispered the Duca; "you must not allow your happiness—our happiness, I would say—to be the sport of an accidental resemblance. Miss Mellingcourt has friends, relations, perhaps, who might not approve her forming what they would call a romantic friendship with foreigners. We must respect our own position as well as hers, and not expose ourselves to any slight from those to whom the charge of this charming girl has been confided."

The spirits of the Duchessa drooped so much at the notion of her not being per-

mitted to cultivate the friendship of Selina, that I reassured her by dwelling on the good-nature of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert, who I was sure would oppose no obstacle to it, and Mr. Rivers offered to introduce the Duca and Duchessa to them, which would take away the awkwardness of their first acquaintance. Soon after dinner, a packet was brought to the Duca de Valentinois, from the Neapolitan Embassy. He opened it, and retired to his own chamber to peruse it. On his return to the *salon*, after an absence of about an hour, I was struck with a visible alteration in his countenance. The Duchessa also observed it, and, becoming alarmed, inquired whether he had received any bad news from home?

"No," replied he, his voice tremulous with emotion; "the intelligence I have received is good, is joyful! Prepare yourself, Francesca, for wonderful news. But you must be calm; you must not give way

to your feelings." But while giving this good counsel, he pressed his wife in his arms, and burst into tears. "We are not childless, my own Francesca, our daughter lives!"

"O God! is it possible!" exclaimed the Duchessa, becoming as pale as marble, and, sinking on her knees, she prayed with fervour. "Enrico! my husband!" said she, "and has this great blessing been indeed reserved for us? Oh! heavenly Mother of God, to thee will I build a chapel for this thy great mercy!" and she held up her hands while she again uttered a fervent prayer. "But tell me, oh! tell me, how all this blessed change has come to pass?" demanded she, after she had ceased her prayer.

"Our child had been stolen, and not killed, as we had been led to believe. Even when she was taken from us, I had reason

to suspect this; but I dared not, my Francesca, in your delicate health, communicate my hopes to you."

"Oh, cruel!" interrupted the Duchessa. "How could you keep this secret from me?"

"Since I came to England, I have discovered the nurse who robbed us of our daughter; but she has not been able to furnish me with any clue where to find her."

"My child!—my child!" sobbed the Duchessa, tears streaming down her cheeks.

"Now, however," resumed the Duca, "the clue is given to me. The man who compelled the nurse to steal our child, in order that, for purposes of his own, it might be imposed as the daughter of his brother, has confessed the whole truth. His statement perfectly coincides with that given me by the nurse, and no doubt any

longer remains. This man confided the papers I have now received to a banker in Sicily, to be forwarded to me in case of his death. They have been unaccountably delayed by the Sicilian banker, but they have — Heaven be praised! — at length reached me."

"And our daughter, where is she? Oh! when can I press her to my heart?"

"You must be calm, my Francesca; you must learn to bear this joy for my sake— for our daughter's."

"And have I indeed a daughter — a creature to love and cherish? Oh! if she but resembles that dear girl I saw this day! But no, that would be too much happiness. Let me but have my child restored to me, and though she may be formed in Nature's least favourable mould, I will love her as though she were the fairest creature on earth. But read me

the confession of the man who for so many long years has kept our daughter from us. May Heaven pardon him, as I do!"

The Duca de Valentinois opened the packet, and read as follows.

CHAPTER XX.

"You have long mourned a daughter as dead,—but know that she lives, and has been well cared for. Stolen, in consequence of my desire, by the nurse to whom you confided her, she was imposed on my brother as his offspring and will be his heiress. It was not I who planned this scheme, though I profited by it; for discovering that his wife, whom he hated, and from whom he was separated, had determined to procure an infant to be passed as his, she in the meanwhile pretending to

be with child, I, for motives of my own, decided on providing, unknown to her, a child of my selection; that when the girl hereafter inherited the large fortune of my brother, I might compel her to buy my silence relative to her spurious claims, and so gain possession of a portion of that wealth, of which my brother's dislike to me, and the circumstance of my being illegitimate, would deprive me. My scheme succeeded. My sister-in-law believed me to be her dupe, and passed off the child I had made the nurse steal from you as her own. My brother took it from her when it was a year old, and concealed it so effectually for above sixteen years that she never could discover it. I, however, succeeded in doing so; and finding that the supposed mother longed to gain possession of the girl for the sole purpose of acquiring an influence over her, in order to share her fortune whenever she inherited it, I, for a large pecuniary remu-

neration, offered my services to steal the girl. Twice I did so, and once was she rescued from my grasp. I have incurred considerable risk by the forcible abduction of this girl, and the myrmidons of the law are actively employed in pursuit of her. Two meddling Englishmen have enlisted themselves in her cause, and I have this day discovered that one of them has found out the place where she and her pretended mother are concealed. This meddling fool I have seized, and he is now a prisoner on board my yacht, of which in an hour I will take the command, and remove him out of the reach of future interference. I am somewhat superstitious. An old slave in the Havannahs, said to be gifted with the knowledge of futurity, foretold that I should come by a violent death at sea. Last night I dreamt that the prediction was about to be fulfilled; and the desire of making some atonement to you, who never

injured me, has tempted me to make this confession. The nurse whom I made steal your child pointed you out to me, in the Park, in London, and told me your name; and this year, at Naples, I recognised you, and heard that you had inherited great wealth. I had thoughts of telling my secret to you, but was deterred by the dread of your having recourse to the laws to punish me. I leave this avowal of the truth in the hands of my banker, at Palermo. Should my presentiment, and the prediction of the sorceress at Cuba, be realized, he is, when the account of my death is authenticated, to forward this to you. Your daughter is known by the name of Miss Somers."

"Gracious heavens! Do I hear aright?" exclaimed I, starting from my seat almost wild with joy. Ever since I had heard Palermo, the yacht, and the forcible abduction cited, my heart had beat quicker; yet I dreaded to indulge hopes that might

be for ever dashed to the ground. But now, however, there was no longer room to doubt. Yes, it was plain that my Selina was *not* the child of Lady Selina Mellingcourt, the offspring of guilt, but the daughter of the Duca and Duchessa de Valentinois; and it was no longer a sin, a crime, to love —to wed her.

"What means this emotion, dear friend?" demanded the Duca.

"Speak—speak, I conjure you!" exclaimed the Duchessa.

"Oh! my dear friends," answered I, "Selina, the lovely Selina, whom you saw to-day, — her whom your hearts proclaimed their rights to,—is no other than your long-lost daughter!"

Vain would be the attempt to paint the joy, the rapture, of the father, mother, and lover. Even Mr. Rivers forgot his usual calmness, and more than once applied his handkerchief to his eyes. When we be-

came a little more composed, I entreated the Duca to finish the perusal of the confession.

"Your daughter," resumed he, "is known by the name of Miss Somers; her pretended mother, Lady Selina Mellingcourt, calls herself Mrs. Lindsell. They depart to-day for a villa near Catania, where they will be more secure from discovery than in the house on the beach. Lady Selina Mellingcourt knows not to whom the stolen child belongs. She supposes it to be that of some poor woman, who sold it to her maid. The girl herself believes that she is the daughter of Mr. Somers, the name my brother has assumed.

"MUNGO MELLINGCOURT."

I now related every incident that had occurred since the first day I had seen Selina borne off from La Cava to the one previous to our intended marriage. Various

and powerful were the emotions of the Duca and Duchessa de Valentinois, as with breathless interest they listened to the narration.

"How inscrutable are the ways of Providence!" exclaimed the Duca. "Our child was at Naples, perhaps lodged within a short distance of the palace of her parents, while her mother guessed not that she was in existence, and I had but faint hope that she lived. It is to you, dear Meredith, that, under Heaven, we owe the recovery of our child; and to you—who would have wedded her when you believed her the daughter of the odious and unworthy parents who claimed her, and who outraged every sentiment of delicacy by their mutual recriminations in that terrible scene at Palermo—that we will confide her happiness. Yes, we will bestow on you her hand; but we must annex one condition to the gift,—which is, that you will

not separate our child from us. Promise this, and she shall be yours!"

Gladly, joyfully, did I give the pledge required; and I was affectionately embraced by my future father and mother-in-law. While we were consulting whether or not the Duca and Duchessa should that night, late as was the hour, proceed to the abode of Mr. Herbert, to claim their daughter, Mrs. Fector, from Bayswater, arrived at the hotel and sent up her name, with a request to see the Duca forthwith.

"Admit her, by all means," said the Duchessa. "Poor woman! I well remember how obliging she was to us in our days of poverty."

The condescension and kindness of the Duchessa quite touched the worthy Mrs. Fector, who now explained the object of her mission. She related the restless impatience of the nurse to see the Duca, that she might inform him that the lady who

had passed for the mother of his child was now, with the attendant, who had assisted in the deception, beneath the same roof with her; and that as her oath hindered her from revealing the name of this lady, she wished to swear to her person—which she safely could do—before the lady left the lodging, as she might at any time depart on a short notice.

"Tell her," said the Duca, "that the death of Mr. Mungo Mellingcourt has absolved her from her oath, that I am already furnished with ample proofs of the identity of my daughter, and that to-morrow Lady Selina Mellingcourt shall become convinced that the deception she has practised is now fully revealed, and that any attempt at denial will be perfectly unavailing."

When Mrs. Fector retired, the Duchessa said, "What a wicked, heartless woman this Lady Selina must be! Think of all the unhappiness she occasioned our precious

daughter, and the misery she inflicted on our dear Meredith, by her atrocious falsehood. She merits the severest punishment; but we are too happy, too grateful to Heaven, to waste a thought on her."

Before we parted for the night, it was arranged that the Duca and Duchessa de Valentinois should the next day, accompanied by Mr. Rivers, go to Mr. Herbert's, reveal the happy discovery they had made, and claim their daughter. I was, after allowing time for all explanations, to join them at Mr. Herbert's, and that gentleman was to be apprised of the intended visit, and its object, by Mr. Rivers. So great was my joy and agitation, that I closed not my eyes during the whole night. I struck my repeater every half hour, and never previously felt time pass so slowly. I tried in vain to read, but though my eyes rested on the page, I could not keep my thoughts confined to the subject. They wandered to

her on whom my soul doted; and reverted with delight to the fact, that now I could make her the mistress of that home where my blessed mother had presided, without being wounded by a single fear, that had that beloved mother lived, she would have disapproved my choice of the successor who was to fill her place.

I was rejoiced when I heard the chambermaids commence their matinal duties, for every token of the business of the day having began, seemed to bring me nearer to the impatiently longed-for hour of going to Mr. Herbert's. I arose from my sleepless couch, and surprised my valet, by ringing for his attendance at a very unusual hour to that when I daily required his services, and when dressed, I could not restrain myself from going to the hotel where the Duca and Duchessa de Valentinois were lodged. Early as the hour was, I found them seated at the breakfast table, although neither were

able to partake of that repast. They, too, had passed a sleepless night, and confessed that joy was quite as great an enemy to sleep as grief is.

"I have been forming a thousand delightful plans for the future," said the Duchessa, "and you will not, I hope, my dear friend, frustrate a single one of them. I have settled that you and our dear daughter are to spend the winters with us at the Pallazza Valentinois at Naples, and we will pass the summers with you at Meredith Park. The apartments fitted up for our reception on our marriage, shall be newly furnished for you, and not a single English comfort shall be omitted in their arrangement. Oh! the delight of preparing rooms for one's children! and the happiness of finding *two* at once. Was it not very considerate of my dear husband, to conceal his hopes of our yet having a daughter, until they turned to a blessed certainty?"

And the still beautiful woman smiled in her husband's face with an expression of such tenderness and sweetness, that both he and I exclaimed that never was there such a likeness as between her and Selina.

"But do you know, that our precious girl must no longer be called Selina," said the Duchessa. "She was baptized Francesca, after my dear mother, who also gave me her name."

"I dare say our dear Meredith will love her equally well by whatever name she may be known," observed the Duca; "and I confess," continued he, "it would always remind me of that hateful woman, Lady Selina, to have our daughter called by that name."

"Oh! the joy, the happiness of hearing him say *our* daughter!" exclaimed the Duchessa. "How have I borne life so long without this blessing! To find in our

child precisely the creature most formed to be loved, is it not indeed a source for never-ending gratitude to Heaven.! And yet, of how many years of happiness have we been defrauded! What delight would it have been to have watched her from infancy to childhood, from childhood to womanhood; to have heard her first lisp our names, and seen her first efforts to walk, while we held out our loving arms as an incitement to the dear, tottering little creature to rush into them! And we have been robbed of all these pleasures!"

"You must not murmur, my own Francesca," said the Duca de Valentinois. "Remember, that if you have missed the enjoyment of witnessing our daughter's childhood, you have been spared the care and anxiety inseparable from a mother's heart during the illnesses from which even the healthiest children are not exempted. You

find our daughter an accomplished and delightful companion, endowed with every gift to excite affection, and to insure respect. Yes, one look on that pure and lofty brow, on that soul-beaming face, would impress conviction on every one who can appreciate goodness, that our daughter is all that the most fastidious could desire."

"Ah! when you have lived in her society, and witnessed, as I have done, the qualities which adorn her, how will you love—nay, adore her!" said I, borne away by my passionate affection.

"It is time to go," said the Duchessa, whose eyes had continually turned to the *pendule* on the chimney-piece.

"May I not accompany you?" asked I. "I will remain in your carriage until summoned to enter her presence; do let me go with you?"

"Yes, dear friend, you shall accompany

us," said the Duchessa; "but you must not enter the house until we send for you; I want to have no interruption to the first moment of joy of clasping our child in our arms. Ah! I see you think me very selfish, but I cannot help it."

CHAPTER XXI.

We set out for Mr. Herbert's, and although the carriage was driven at as rapid a pace as was consistent with safety, the Duca and Duchessa complained of the length of time we took in going, and kept continually asking, "Are we near?—is this the street? O! shew me the house?"

The Duchessa trembled violently when the carriage stopped, nor was the Duca less agitated. Mr. Rivers was in the hall, ready to receive them, and to present Mr. and Mrs. Herbert. The hall-door closed after them, and

I threw myself into a corner of the carriage, my heart throbbing violently with joyful emotions. I kept my watch out and counted the minutes, starting every time I heard the least noise near the door. Oh! how interminably long seemed the hour that elapsed before I was summoned! At length, Mr. Rivers appeared at the door, and beckoned me. I leaped from the carriage, before the footman could let down the steps, and rushing through the hall, flew, rather than ran, up the stairs into the drawing-room. Never shall the joy of that moment be forgotten! On the sofa, seated between her father and mother, whose joint arms encircled her waist, sate my adored Selina. A radiant blush spread itself over her beautiful face as I approached and knelt before her. Her parents took her hand, and placing it within mine, said, "We bestow this blessing on you, and doubt not you will ever prove most worthy of it."

I pressed that dear hand to my lips, and my eyes met the dove-like ones of her I adored. Never were words so eloquent as that glance! It repaid every care and sorrow our separation had caused me.

"Now," said Selina, "I have no wish unsatisfied! You know," continued she, turning those beautiful eyes on me, "how I longed, how I languished, to have a father, a mother, that I could love. What an aching void was left in my heart even when about to be united to you, from my craving desire to have parents. Judge, then, of my happiness at present, when no longer bowed down by the consciousness of having a mother whom I could neither love nor respect. I have such a mother!" and she flung her arms around the neck of the Duchessa, while tears of joy chased each other down her delicate cheeks. "And my father, too, my dear father!" said she, looking at the Duca, with eyes beaming with affection.

"Oh! the bliss of having a father to love, and be loved by, whom I can respect and venerate!"

An hour flew by, ere we had thought that half that time had elapsed, and the Duchessa, ever thoughtful of others, proposed that Mr. and Mrs. Herbert, with their daughter, should be sent for. Warm and fervent were the thanks offered to them by the Duca and Duchessa, for all their kindness to Selina; and great was the pleasure felt by this worthy family at finding that the amiable young creature in whose destiny they felt so sincere an interest, was no longer an isolated being, but the cherished daughter of the noble pair whom, even on so short an acquaintance, they saw were worthy to possess such a treasure. Nor was Madame de Stourville forgotten in the thanks, and she was all smiles and tears. It was now arranged that Mr. Herbert and Mr. Rivers should accompany the Duca de Valentinois

to the house at Bayswater, to explain to Lady Selina Mellingcourt that the deception she had practised was fully exposed, and to confront her, if necessary, with the nurse; while I was to escort the Duchessa and her lovely daughter to the hotel, where the Herbert family promised to join them at dinner, and to bring the *gouvernante*.

"Does not all this appear like a blissful dream?" said the beautiful Francesca, as, pressed fondly to the side of her doting mother, she looked radiant with happiness. "And to think how near I was to my dear father and mother, without suspecting that such a blessing was in store for me. Oh! my heart should have whispered their vicinity."

"How thankful your dear father and I ought to be," said the Duchessa, "that those for whose daughter you passed did not usurp that place in your affections which happily it was reserved for us to fill. Oh!

I should have been jealous even of the dead, had you, my own Francesca, loved others as we wish to be loved. And yet this is a selfish feeling; for to have felt a child's affection for them, you must have been treated with indulgent fondness, and such treatment would have rendered your past life more happy than I fear it has been."

"The trials I have endured, dearest mother, have only served to teach me more fully to appreciate my present happiness," replied the dear girl.

It was a touching and beautiful sight to behold the mother and daughter, their arms interwoven around each other's slender waist; the one in all the perfection of matronly beauty, the other in the bloom of youthful loveliness, and so like each other, that the half-open rose resembles not more the full-blown one than Francesca did her mother. When the Duca de Valentinois returned to the hotel, and saw his newly-found daughter

seated between the Duchessa and me, with happiness beaming in her countenance, and that air of feeling as perfectly at home as if she had never been separated from her mother, tears of joy filled his eyes, and when Francesca ran to embrace him, and to take his hat and gloves, he pressed her in his arms and fondly blessed her.

"I have so long been defrauded of the pleasure of performing the little services which are so soothing to a daughter's heart to fulfil, that I shall jealously exact my right henceforth," said Francesca, "and you both," looking at her parents with ineffable love, "must submit to my officiousness."

"Do tell me all the particulars of your interview with that wicked Lady Selina Mellingcourt?" said the Duchessa.

"Wicked and heartless she may well be called," observed the Duca. "When we entered her presence, Mr. Herbert explained

to her the object of our visit. She boldly denied the charge, and asserted that our child was hers; but when the nurse was brought into the room, and stated the truth, she was confounded. I then communicated to her the confession of her confederate, Mungo Mellingcourt, when, finding that further denial was unavailing, she acknowledged that she had imposed a spurious child on her husband, but declared that she had believed that child to have been the offspring of a poor woman, who had resigned all interest in it, on receipt of a certain sum of money. 'I am willing to attest this statement,' said Lady Selina Mellingcourt; 'in fact, it will now be necessary, for my own interests, that it should be proved, for the young person being neither my daughter nor that of my late husband, she cannot inherit the large fortune which he bequeathed to her, and which will now naturally revert to me, as the wife and only heir of Mr. Mel-

lingcourt.' 'You are in error, madam,' replied Mr. Herbert. "The will of your late husband is so worded, that the young lady in question, whosoever she may have been proved to be, is the sole inheritor of his fortune. Mr. Mellingcourt doubted her having any claim on him, but her dutiful attendance and watchful kindness during his illness so won on his feelings, that he secured to her the indisputable possession of his property.' She confessed that she had taken her present lodging to be near Kensington Gardens, having learned that her pretended daughter frequently walked there, as she wished to have an interview with her unknown to Mr. Herbert. We left her in a state of anger painful to witness, at being baffled in her hopes of profiting by the change in our daughter's position, and though I assured her that a suitable allowance would be continued to her, I did not perceive that her anger was abated. The disclosures of the nurse having revealed the imposition prac-

tised on her by her *femme de chambre*, she as angrily reproached that person, as if her own conduct had been free from blame, and drew on herself, in return, a scene of coarse and vulgar recrimination, most humiliating to any one possessed of the least delicacy or feeling."

When the Herberts and Madame de Stourville arrived to dinner, the latter, always anxious to put herself forward, addressed the Duchessa de Valentinois, saying she hoped "that *Madame la Duchesse et Monsieur le Duc* would have no reason to be dissatisfied with the education bestowed on, and the principles implanted in, their charming daughter."

I could scarcely restrain a smile while I listened to the old Frenchwoman arrogating to herself the merit due to the governess who had brought up my beloved Francesca, and who had, while giving her every accomplishment, instilled into her mind every virtue.

"But it was not her mind alone that I attended to, Madame la Duchesse," continued Madame de Stourville, "for during our tour in France and Italy, Mademoiselle had no *femme de chambre*, and so fondly was I devoted to her, that I performed all the functions of one; *à propos* of which, I often noticed a small, black mark, like a cipher, on the sole of her right foot, which I never could efface."

"Thanks, Madame, for having named it," replied the Duca. "It had wholly escaped my memory, but it confirms a statement made by the nurse, of my daughter's foot having been marked by gunpowder by Mr. Mungo Mellingcourt."

"*Oh! que je suis contente* dat *ma chère et belle Mademoiselle* is not de daughter of dat abominable man dat did call me *vieille folle*. *Oui*, *Monsieur le Duc*, you may well look *incredule*, but so he did call me."

The Duca and Duchessa de Valentinois

were too happy to take otherwise than in good part, the *bavardage* of the good-natured old woman, whose failings they forgot in consideration of the affection she had always evinced towards their daughter.

In a week after the *dénouement* above related, I had the supreme happiness of leading my adored Francesca to the altar, and, on the same day, I conducted her and my new father and mother to Meredith Park, where our honeymoon was passed.

"What strange rumours the newspapers circulate!" observed Mrs. Davenport to me, on making us her first visit. "It was stated, that you, my dear Mr. Meredith, were to be married to a Miss Mellingcourt. I knew it could not be true, and so I told Mr. Davenport, but he, who has grown so deaf that I can hardly make him hear, answered me, when I gave my reasons why such a marriage was improbable, 'Ah! I find you have not forgotten the old scandalous chronicles of the neighbourhood.'"

I should only excite the envy of my readers, were I to attempt to paint the happiness of my wedded life. It still continues, though time has streaked with silver the tresses of my Francesca, and stolen away mine.

A handsome provision was made for Lady Selina Mellingcourt, who, however, lived not long to enjoy it. Madame de Stourville retired to her *belle France*, with a stipend adequate, not only to her wants, but to her wishes. Mr. Rivers has continued to reside with me, and is now the preceptor of my sons; and Mrs. Fector and the nurse have had no reason to complain of our liberality. The Duca and Duchessa de Valentinois, though now an aged couple, enjoy good health, and retain a freshness of feeling seldom to be found in persons so far advanced in years. They assert that this exemption from the ills attendant on old age is to be attributed to the happiness conferred on them by their children and grand-

children. The good Giuditta lived to see our first-born—which she declared was a much finer *bambina* than its mother—and died, beloved and regretted by us all.

And now, courteous reader, fare you well. Should you winter at Naples, we may chance to meet; or, in summer, should you pass the gate of Meredith Park, its porter will not refuse you entrance to view the magnificent oaks and cedars, for which it is so famed, and the splendid gallery of pictures, by the choicest old Italian masters, the gift of my excellent father-in-law.

THE END.

T. C. Savill, Printer, 107, St. Martin's Lane.